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IRI Quarterly Trends Analyzer



INNOVATION RESEARCH
INTERCHANGE

Accelerating Value Creation

The IRI Quarterly Trends Analyzer examines the strategic environment in which innovation and R&D take place and flags up potential trends that you should factor into your strategic planning. At the end of each quarter, potential trends are examined by the IRI Foresights Advisory Board and assessed for their potential impact on innovation. In this report, key potential trends are described and vital questions you should ask yourself as you conduct your strategic planning are listed. In addition, we include some interesting possibilities ('weak signals') at the end of the report that we will keep an eye on to see if they will rise to the level of an impactful trend.

Innovation Research Interchange (formerly the Industrial Research Institute) is an inclusive membership organization with hundreds of global members in private-sector companies and federally funded laboratories. Founded in 1938, we lead and advance the field of innovation management by creating contemporary practices. Some of the world's most widely adopted models – such as “open innovation”, “front end of innovation”, and “stage-gate” – were born from the work of our members. We value strength in cooperation and partner with other organizations at the forefront of developments in innovation management, creating a hub for all to convene and contribute in an experimental, noncompetitive, and noncommercial environment. The IRI is a division of the National Association of Manufacturers.



January 2024 Trends

- 01 — **Flipping the script on plastics**
- 02 — **Shifting retirement expectations and what it may mean for the workforce**
- 03 — **Will the freedom of speech debate impact industry?**



Flipping the script on plastics



01. Description

New York state's far-reaching lawsuit against Pepsico is a test case for what could lead to significant legal action against manufacturers, particularly those dealing with plastic. It seeks to shift the narrative on plastic pollution away from consumer responsibility for recycling toward plastic production and challenges statements around recyclability. At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the pervasive nature and impact of microplastics on health. How is your organization preparing for the outcome of the Pepsico case? Have you assessed the level of microplastics in your products and in your waste materials? Are you working on ways to mitigate this?



02. Learn more

- [New York Attorney General Sues Pepsi in Plastic Pollution Fight](#)
- [Why It Matters that New York State is Suing PepsiCo Over Single Use Plastic](#)
- [Climate Lawsuits are On the Rise and This is What They Are Based On](#)
- [Yale Experts Explain Climate Lawsuits](#)
- [Attorney General James Takes Historic Action Against Pepsico](#)
- [Microplastics are everywhere: Is it possible to reduce our exposure?](#)
- [Which proteins contain the most microplastics?](#)





03. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are our recycling goals well-defined, and how can they be improved to meet legal and consumer expectations?
- How will evolving laws influence our recycling initiatives and objectives?
- How do the economics of solid waste disposal impact our company's operations?
- What is the current and potential impact of regulatory changes, especially regarding extended producer responsibility?
- Can we leverage organizations like the NAM to have our voice heard at the policy level?
- How can we use regulatory changes as opportunities for innovation within our company?
- How aligned is consumer perception with what our company can realistically achieve in terms of sustainability?
- How much does consumer perception impact our relationships with major retailers and distributors?
- In what ways can we leverage technology, such as machine learning, to address these challenges?
- Are we about to experience a materials discovery renaissance, and how can we leverage new materials responsibly?
- How can we contribute to finding alternatives to plastics and promoting innovation in sustainable materials?
- How do we measure microplastics in our products, and are our testing methods robust?



Shifting retirement expectations and what it may mean for the workforce



01. Description

Baby boomers are opting to delay retirement or forgo it altogether due to financial considerations, economic uncertainty, health insurance, and fear of identity loss. Overall, the decision to retire is increasingly shaped by a complex interplay of financial, personal, and societal factors, reflecting a more diverse and flexible approach to aging in the workplace. How will the graying of the workforce affect workplace norms? What will be the impact on younger generations' ability to move up the career ladder and earning potential? How can companies balance the need for experienced staff with the need for change and development of the next generation?



02. Learn more

- [Why People Can't Figure Out When It's Time to Retire](#)
- [Why 'No One Wants to Work Anymore': Pandemic Market Boom Let Millions Retire](#)
- [Brain Power Dropped Among Over-50s during pandemic](#)
- [How to lengthen the stay of boomers at retirement age](#)





03. Ask yourself these questions:

- How can we incentivize and facilitate the transfer of knowledge from tenured workers to younger generations?
- Are there flexible retirement options, such as part-time or consulting roles, to retain valuable knowledge holders?
- What strategies can we implement to identify and retain valuable talent, especially as Gen X is now also approaching retirement?
- How can we effectively address the challenges in R&D when replacing key knowledge holders becomes a significant hurdle?
- Is there a need to reevaluate the resource allocation for knowledge transfer within R&D?
- How can we mitigate the reduction in time available for knowledge transfer, especially in lean organizational structures?
- What steps can be taken to ensure comprehensive leadership training for the workforce?
- How does the centralization and virtual nature of HR impact training, experience, and the overall understanding of workforce issues?
- What steps can be taken to leverage AI for knowledge capture?
- How will AI impact workforce dynamics, particularly in the context of tacit knowledge transfer?



Will the freedom of speech debate impact industry?



01. Description

Recent controversies surrounding free speech on college campuses have garnered significant media attention that may spill over into industry. The resignation of the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard's presidents following their recent congressional testimony came after weeks of simmering resentment from donors and university trustees. The actions of those individuals have been likened to those of activist investors in industry as they threatened to withhold significant funds. Between activist investors, the range and permanence of statements on social media, and entrenching political beliefs, many companies may be forced to reckon with their own free speech crisis. This could impact not just how free speech is handled within companies, but also force companies to take or avoid certain public stances as investors and shareholders make their power felt.



02. Learn more

- ['It Feels Like the New McCarthyism': How the Israel-Hamas War Is Redefining the Limits of Free Speech](#)
- [How Rich Alumni Ousted Penn's President](#)
- [Debate Over Free Speech on College Campuses](#)
- [Ivy League Presidents Reckon with Swift Backlash](#)
- [Bill Ackman's Ruthless Quest to Oust College Presidents](#)





03. Ask yourself these questions:

- How can we balance the impact of external pressures while ensuring sound business decisions?
- To what extent has our industry or market been politicized, and how does it impact our business operations?
- Is it more advantageous for our company to remain apolitical, considering the potential risks associated with taking a stance?
- What impact do our company's political or social stances have on attracting and retaining talent, especially younger generations?
- How do we strike a balance between allowing employee expression (e.g., wearing a Black Lives Matter shirt) and maintaining a cohesive workplace environment?
- How can we prepare for potential escalation in political polarization within the U.S. and its impact on our industry and workforce?
- In the event of a crisis related to political or social issues, how effective is our crisis communication and reputation management?
- How does our company ensure ethical decision-making in the face of external pressures and socio-political dynamics?
- Are there frameworks in place to guide decision-makers through potentially contentious situations?



Additional trends to watch

We'll keep an eye on these trends as they develop and let you know how they may impact innovation.

- [How weight loss drugs like Ozempic could radically reshape the food business](#)
- [The Fight Over Return-to-Office Is Turning Into a Disability Dispute](#)
- [More than 300 companies to start reporting impact on nature](#)
- [Workplace Wellness Programs Have Little Benefit, Study Finds](#)
- [The M.B.A.s Who Can't Find Jobs](#)



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