



The state of HR Bandwidth

How HR leaders can reduce hidden admin work, simplify processes and get back to the people work that matters

See where unnecessary work is consuming your team's capacity, identify what to improve first and create more room for strategic, people-focused work.



HR has a bandwidth problem

What is HR bandwidth?

HR bandwidth is the time, attention and operational capacity available to support the organization and its people. Interruptions, unclear ownership, duplicate work and disconnected information all reduce how much productive capacity a team has.

HR teams are expected to keep everyday operations moving while helping the organization prepare for what comes next.

They recruit and onboard employees. Support managers. Maintain accurate records. Respond to employee questions. Manage compliance requirements. Deliver workforce information. Improve engagement, retention and development.

These responsibilities already place significant demands on HR. Avoidable friction makes that workload heavier than it needs to be.

A policy question leads to several follow-up emails. Missing information delays a routine request. The same employee details are entered in more than one place. A manager needs help finding a process. An approval sits untouched until HR follows up.

Each task may take only a few minutes. Together, they can consume hours of attention every week.

Available HR capacity



Avoidable effort



More capacity for productive work

Productive work includes essential administration, employee support, manager enablement and strategic people priorities. The goal is to reduce unnecessary effort around that work. enablement and strategic people priorities. The goal is to reduce unnecessary effort around that work.

The hidden workload

Some HR responsibilities are easy to see. Hiring campaigns, payroll cycles, open enrollment, compliance reporting and performance reviews are recognizable parts of the HR calendar.

Other work is less visible because it builds through repeated actions, extra checks, unclear handoffs and last-minute corrections. The work your team can see is only part of the work it carries.



Repetition

Work completed more than once, such as answering recurring questions or entering the same information in different places.



Reconciliation

Work required to confirm accuracy and consistency, such as comparing records across systems or manually validating reports.



Coordination

Work required to keep a process moving, such as managing approvals or confirming who owns the next step.



Workarounds

Unofficial methods used to bridge gaps, such as shadow spreadsheets or undocumented processes.



Recovery

Work created when an issue is discovered late, such as correcting preventable mistakes or reconstructing missing information.

Hidden work often appears between processes, where information changes hands, responsibility becomes unclear or someone must step in to keep the work moving.

Make hidden work visible

A task does not need to take hours to have a significant impact. A five-minute activity completed once is minor. A five-minute activity completed repeatedly by several people is not.

For example, an employee data correction takes five minutes, happens 30 times each week and regularly involves two HR team members.

That is five hours of HR capacity every week. You do not need a perfect time study. You need enough visibility to make a better decision.

Apply the calculation to one recurring activity. Then ask whether every step is necessary, whether HR needs to own it and whether the need could be prevented or addressed earlier.



5 minutes



30 occurrences



2 people



300 minutes



Where HR bandwidth is being lost

Hidden work can appear across the employee experience and throughout day-to-day HR operations. The issue is often not the responsibility itself. It is the effort required to complete it.

Hiring & Onboarding

Approvals managed through email

Candidate information entered more than once

Missing documents and inconsistent manager follow-up

Core HR administration

Recurring leave and policy questions

Updates tracked outside the main HR system

Routine requests that require HR intervention

Compliance & reporting

Manual tracking and spreadsheet preparation

Incomplete documentation and fragmented audit trails

Reports that depend on one person's knowledge

Manager support

Repeated process questions

Unclear responsibilities and limited access to information

Approvals that require reminders

Engagement & development

Manual scheduling and follow-up

Notes and plans stored in different places

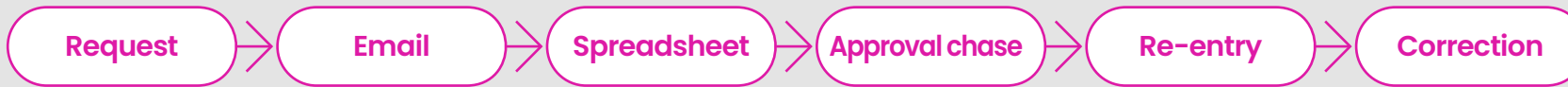
People initiatives that are continually deprioritized

Start with work that happens frequently, crosses several systems, requires repeated correction or depends heavily on one person.

Modernization should remove work, not move it

New technology can make HR work easier, but a new system does not automatically create capacity. Without process review, the same work may simply move to a new place.

Before modernization



Technology without process change



Effective modernization



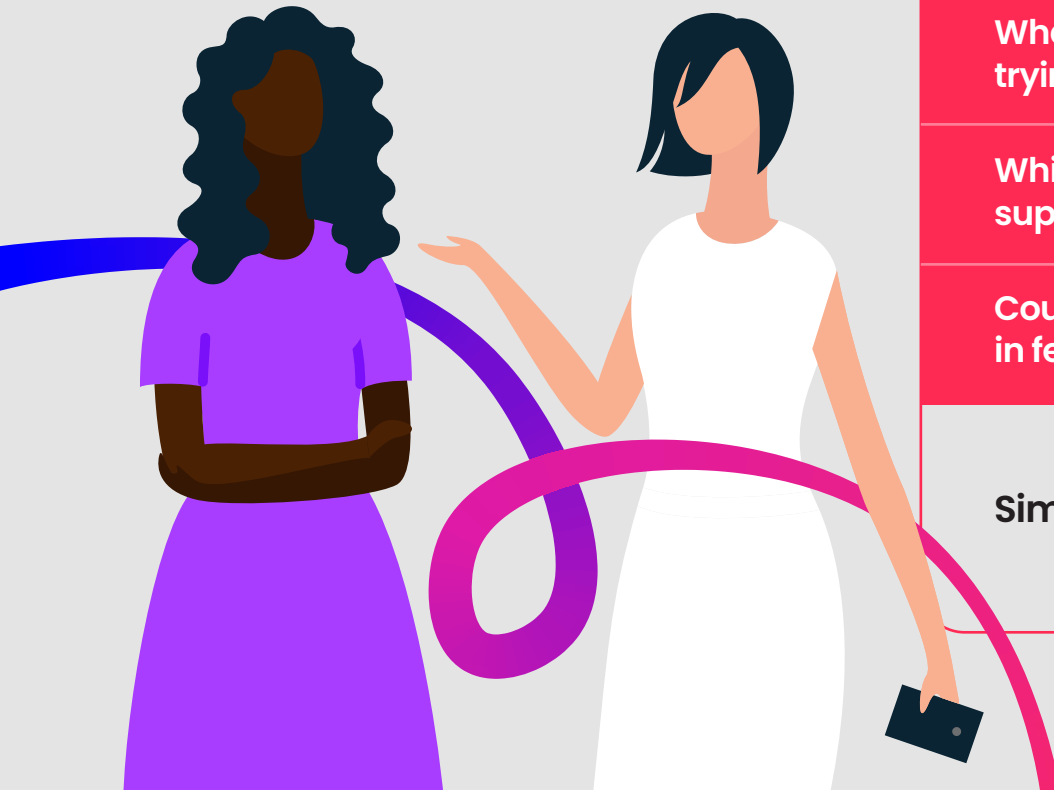
Before changing a system or introducing automation, ask:

- Which steps are genuinely necessary?
- Where is information entered more than once?
- Is ownership clear?
- Does the change reduce work for HR, employees and managers?

The best modernization efforts make work simpler from the start.

Four ways to give HR bandwidth back

Not every administrative task can or should be removed. The aim is to protect essential work while reducing duplicate effort, sharing appropriate responsibility and automating predictable steps.



1 Simplify the process

Start with the outcome. Processes often grow more complicated over time as checks, approvals and exceptions are added.

What outcome is the process trying to achieve?

Which steps do not directly support that outcome?

Could the work be completed in fewer stages?

Simplify before you automate

2 Connect the information

Information should not need to be recreated, transferred manually or checked repeatedly.

Where is the source of truth?

Where is information recreated or checked manually?

Can information move with the process?

Connected information reduces duplicate entry, improves visibility and helps HR maintain more accurate records with less compliance risk.

3 Empower employees and managers

Routine activities should not always depend on HR. Employees and managers can take

Does HR need to own every step?

What could employees or managers complete directly?

What guidance or controls would help them act confidently?

Good self-service reduces dependency while improving the experience for everyone.

4 Act earlier

Many interruptions happen

Which issues regularly become urgent?

What information is usually missing?

Could reminders or workflow prompts or AI recommendations surface the need sooner?

Earlier action creates more predictable processes and fewer last-minute fire drills.



What should HR fix first?

The biggest process is not always the best place to start. A complex annual activity may take several days, while a smaller task repeated every day may consume more capacity over the course of a year.



Compare opportunities using four factors:

1 Frequency:
How often does the activity occur?

2 Friction:
How many steps, systems, handoffs, reminders and corrections are involved?

3 Reach:
How many employees, managers and HR team members experience the process?

4 Risk:
What happens if the activity is delayed, missed or completed incorrectly?

Rate each factor as high, medium or low.



High:
frequent, difficult to complete, widely experienced or carrying meaningful risk



Medium:
recurring or inconvenient, but manageable with limited operational impact



Low:
infrequent, straightforward, narrowly experienced and low risk

Prioritize activities with one or more high ratings, especially where high frequency and high friction occur together. Any high-risk activity may require attention regardless of its other ratings.

A four-step, 30-day action plan

Choose one recurring activity. Small, focused changes are easier to test and more likely to create momentum.

1 Spot the hidden work

Track the activity for one or two weeks and map the process people actually follow.

Repeated questions or duplicate entry

Manual follow-up and delayed approvals

Missing information, corrections and unnecessary handoffs

2 Measure the impact

Record how often the activity occurs, how long it takes and how many people are involved.

Use frequency × time × people involved

Note recurring corrections or interruptions

An estimate is enough to identify whether the process deserves attention

3 Redesign one part

Choose a focused change to test.

Remove one unnecessary step

Simplify one handoff or clarify one responsibility

Eliminate one source of duplicate entry or repeated follow-up

4 Test and reinvest the time

Run the revised process for 30 days.

Measure time, follow-ups, corrections and completion speed

Adjust the process based on what you learn

Decide where the recovered capacity will go

Recovered time could support manager development, workforce planning, employee development, succession planning, engagement, retention, organizational change or more proactive employee support.

30-day bandwidth worksheet

Choose one recurring activity and use the prompts below to identify a change worth testing over the next 30 days.

Prompt	Your response
Activity	
Main source of friction	
Estimated time consumed	
Change to test	
Owner	
Measure of success	
Use of recovered time	
Review date	



What restored bandwidth looks like

Administrative work will always be part of HR. Avoidable friction does not have to be.

Simpler processes, connected information, effective self-service and earlier action give HR more room to plan, support and lead.

With limited bandwidth

HR reacts after issues occur

Employees depend on HR for routine activities

Managers wait for answers

Reporting requires manual preparation

Strategic work is repeatedly delayed

Processes depend on individual knowledge

Errors are discovered late

With greater bandwidth

HR identifies needs earlier

Employees can find information and take appropriate action

Managers have clearer guidance

Workforce information is easier to access

Workflows are more consistent

People priorities receive sustained attention

HR has more room to plan, support and lead

Create more room for people-focused work with People First

People First, powered by MHR, is an all-in-one HCM platform that brings recruitment, onboarding, core HR and talent processes into one connected, mobile-friendly experience.

MHR just understood the needs and complexities of our business, and we were able to build our workflows around that to better the user experience.

London School of Economics and Political Science

It helps organizations reduce routine work, improve access to information and make everyday HR processes easier to complete.

Simplify everyday HR

Use clear, repeatable workflows to make routine activities easier to understand and manage.

Connect people and information

Bring employee data and HR processes together to reduce duplicate work, improve visibility and support clearer records.

Support employee and manager self-service

Give people simple, mobile access to the information and actions relevant to them.

Act earlier

Use workflows, notifications and human-centered automation to identify missing information, reduce follow-up and keep work moving.

people first
powered by MHR

We can now make data-driven decisions. Previously, it was a very reactive service that we provided from people and culture.

Leeds Trinity University

Explore how People First can reduce hidden admin work and simplify the employee experience.

See People First in action





About MHR

MHR has been driving innovation across the HR technology space for over 40 years. We don't just meet the industry standard, we exceed it. Engineered with the latest SaaS technology, our product, People First enables increased employee productivity and organizational growth with a demonstratable return on investment.

People First is guided by what our customers and the market demand in a rapidly changing world.

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