

What does an AI-augmented HR department look like?

HR department

Where an HR and People function is heading in the next 2–3 years, and what GRAIL believes it takes to get there first.

“Judgment stays with the person. Preparation runs continuously.”

- 01 Can your managers get one answer without hunting your company?
- 02 Which work in your HR team no longer deserves human time?
- 03 Has your HR team tested the change it asks of others?



WHAT DOES AN AI-AUGMENTED HR DEPARTMENT LOOK LIKE?

Where an HR and People function is heading in the next 2–3 years, and what GRAIL believes it takes to get there first.

HR has been asked to support every employee and manager while its information remains scattered across systems, documents and private memory. **The change that matters is that reliable service, case preparation and workforce planning become continuous rather than occasional.** The judgment stays with the person. The preparation becomes institutional.

THE PEOPLE FUNCTION IN 2028



Judgment stays with the person. Preparation runs continuously.

GRAIL's view, from building AI-augmented work inside organisations. A position, not a survey.

The company depends on information HR cannot see *together*.

A typical Nordic mid-market HR function has two to eight people serving 100 to 2,000 employees. The team usually includes an HR head, HR business partners or generalists, a payroll or compensation specialist, and someone covering recruitment, learning, HR systems or internal communication. Several responsibilities are combined. Payroll may sit in finance or with an external provider.

The function affects revenue through recruitment speed, capability and retention. It shapes working capacity through staffing, absence, compensation and administration. Its work also determines whether managers can act consistently when the issue is sensitive, consequential or unfamiliar.

Eight processes

01	Recruitment and onboarding	05	Policy, compliance and employee service
02	Compensation, benefits and the payroll interface	06	Workforce planning and role design
03	Performance, development and skills	07	Engagement and internal communication
04	Employee relations, union consultation and co-determination	08	Offboarding and organisational knowledge retention

The information does not sit in one place. It is divided across the HRIS, applicant-tracking system, payroll platform, Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace, learning platform, survey tool and spreadsheets. Policies remain in PDFs. Managers keep consequential context in email, Teams and their heads.

Job descriptions describe positions but rarely show the work actually performed. Skills inventories become incomplete because employees and managers do not maintain them. Annual reviews begin from memory. Workforce plans begin with another reconciliation of finance and HR spreadsheets.

HR is expected to answer continuously, but its records, policies and management context are maintained intermittently.

The result is not only slower service. It is inconsistent advice, repeated reconstruction, stale workforce assumptions and less time for the conversations where an employee or manager needs a person.

HR becomes a continuous management *service*.

The function is rebuilt around two structural shifts.

HR moves from transaction broker to always-available management service. Employees receive sourced answers to routine questions. Managers receive prepared material for hiring, onboarding, development and employee cases. HR handles the exceptions and conversations where accountability, credibility or human recognition matter. The service promise changes from a future response to a reliable answer now, with a person available when the issue needs one.

Workforce management moves from annual jobs to continuous task-level design. Roles are decomposed into work that can run through a defined workflow, work performed by a person with an agent, work that should be retired and work that becomes newly affordable. Skills suggestions update from completed work and learning, subject to employee review. HR and finance can rerun workforce scenarios when demand, wages or operating plans change.

The boundary of the function expands with both changes. HR becomes the owner of role redesign, workforce adoption and the company's AI-literacy operating model. Legal, IT, finance and functional leaders keep their respective accountabilities.

The function gets faster because preparation and coordination happen continuously. More capacity moves toward manager support, recruiting relationships, role design and workforce decisions.

WHERE IT IS WEAKEST: cultural judgment, employee relations, performance assessment and employment decisions. These depend on context, fairness and recognition. They stay with people, and should.

A day, a week, a *month*.

A company that invests heavily still has an HR team in 2028. A six-person team may remain six people. One or two roles move from administration and report assembly toward workforce analysis, service design, manager coaching and stewardship of the employee and manager service layer.

The day

EMPLOYEE AND MANAGER SERVICE

Employees ask about leave, benefits, policies or learning through a governed conversational layer. The answer carries its source and effective date. Low-risk requests enter the HRIS workflow after confirmation. Sensitive or ambiguous questions route to HR.

HIRING AND ONBOARDING

Recruiting coordinators receive prepared candidate packs, interview structures and scheduling exceptions. Recruiters decide whom to progress, and hiring managers make the selection. New hires receive guidance based on role, location, completed tasks and upcoming meetings. The manager judges progress and fit.

THE HR EXCEPTION BRIEF

HR receives a short view of overdue approvals, payroll anomalies, expiring certifications, unresolved cases and onboarding risks. The team chooses where a conversation, investigation or escalation is needed.

THE WEEK HR partners review workforce signals with managers. Agents assemble evidence without labelling people as weak performers or flight risks. Recruiting teams examine slate quality, interview evidence and candidate experience. Learning priorities come from current work and changing roles. HR, finance and operating leaders examine updated capacity scenarios instead of rebuilding a spreadsheet.

THE MONTH The team runs payroll and compensation controls, reviews hiring and internal-mobility outcomes, refreshes role-task maps and audits employee-facing answers. The HR head brings the executive team a workforce decision brief: which capabilities are constrained, which roles are changing, where management action is late and where succession risk is forming.

Current answers for every employee, structured preparation for every manager and a workforce view that changes with the business. Work that once happened after a request or during an annual cycle becomes the operating rhythm.

What runs, and what stays with the *person*.

PROCESS	WHAT THE AGENT DOES	WHAT STAYS WITH THE PERSON
Recruitment and onboarding	Drafts the role and interview structure from approved templates, organises CV facts, schedules meetings, prepares evidence by criterion and builds a role-specific onboarding plan	Recruiters decide whom to progress; hiring managers select, judge progress and assess fit
Compensation, benefits and payroll interface	Collects missing inputs, compares changes with approved contracts, flags anomalies and drafts explanations or correction cases	HR or finance approves every pay change; statutory and collective-agreement calculations stay in the payroll engine
Performance, development and skills	Summarises goals and documented work, drafts coaching questions, suggests learning and proposes skills updates for employee review	Managers coach, determine ratings and make promotion decisions; private coaching notes stay outside general retrieval
Employee relations and co-determination	Builds case timelines, retrieves relevant policy, prepares consultation checklists and drafts meeting records	HR owns the conversation, assesses credibility, decides escalation and keeps restricted case material restricted
Policy, compliance and employee service	Answers with source paragraphs, jurisdiction and effective date, drafts localised updates and routes ambiguous requests	Policy owners approve content; HR handles sensitive interpretation and exceptions
Workforce planning and role design	Maintains task maps and prepares capacity, hiring and redeployment scenarios from connected workforce and operating data	HR designs roles with incumbents and managers; finance validates the economics; executives decide staffing
Engagement and internal communication	Groups themes, removes identifiers where possible, tests cohort differences and drafts manager-specific communication	HR interprets causes, decides action and keeps individual surveillance out of scope
Offboarding and knowledge retention	Coordinates access, pay, assets and succession tasks, prepares the manager and turns approved material into handover assets	HR handles the exit conversation and decides what knowledge may be retained

Read the right-hand column twice. Selection, pay, ratings, credibility, interpretation, role design and employee conversations remain human work. The left-hand column exists to give those judgments better evidence and more attention.

Four stages, and the *HRIS position* today.

A realistic path has four stages. They map directly onto the rungs of GRAIL's "The Access Ladder", and the order is the same.

- 01 DOCUMENTS ONLY**
Curated policies, handbooks, collective agreements, role descriptions and anonymised extracts support policy answers, drafting, role decomposition and scenario exercises. No employee-level live data is required. People supply case context by hand.
- 02 READ ACCESS**
Core HR data comes first: employee ID, status, organisational unit, manager, location, role and start date. Payroll, time and absence follow. Applicant, learning, performance and engagement sources come later because they introduce more sensitive judgments.
- 03 READ AND ACT WITH APPROVAL**
The service layer may submit leave, create a case, prepare a job change or start onboarding. Existing HRIS rules validate the transaction. A named person confirms every consequential action and can inspect the source.
- 04 AUTONOMY WITHIN LIMITS**
Routine, reversible actions can proceed inside defined thresholds. Employment status, pay, candidate progression, ratings and disciplinary actions always retain named human accountability.

The HRIS position, as of September 2, 2026

Workday	Mature REST, SOAP and Graph APIs support headless operation. Agent-ready access still requires tenant and contractual confirmation.
SAP SuccessFactors	Employee Central exposes OData APIs. Current deployments can expose approved APIs and integration flows through a governed gateway.
HiBob	Bob has a documented hosted HRIS MCP covering employee data, time off and tasks. Authentication and tenant entitlement require verification.
Personio	Public APIs and webhooks cover core employee and recruiting workflows. External agents need a controlled API adapter.
Sympa	An open REST API and integration estate support connection. No official hosted MCP position is documented in the source.
Flex HRM	Web API and file interfaces are available. Employee-facing access should sit behind a company-owned gateway.
Hogia	A developer portal provides API documentation, sandbox and event-based integration support. Public endpoint coverage remains incomplete.

Point connections stop being enough when workforce planning depends on history across HRIS, payroll, applicant tracking, finance, learning and operations. A warehouse or lake then supplies effective-dated history, common employee and position keys, pseudonymised analysis and repeatable scenarios.

In the headless model the HRIS keeps records, rules, permissions and audit history. People work mainly through a governed service layer. Read, draft, submit and approve permissions remain separate, and every action records the person, agent identity, records accessed, proposed change, approval and system response.

Six things we believe, from building *this*.

HR is where augmentation meets the reality of power, privacy and human consequence. Six beliefs shape the operating model, and a leadership team needs to settle them before the technology settles them by accident.

01 **The service promise changes before the organisation chart does.**

Employees and managers should not need to know which system or specialist holds an answer. The operating layer retrieves the approved source, applies the relevant context and brings in a person when judgment begins. That is a different HR service, even when the team remains the same size.

02 **The role is the wrong unit of redesign. The task is the right one.**

A job title hides work that should run differently, work that needs a person with better preparation and work that no longer deserves time. HR has to map the work with incumbents and managers before it can redesign roles with credibility.

03 **A sourced answer is more valuable than a fluent answer.**

Policy service fails when it sounds certain but cannot show the rule, jurisdiction or effective date behind the response. Trust comes from visible sources, current ownership and a clear route to a person when the issue is ambiguous.

04 **Preparation can run continuously. Judgment cannot be delegated.**

A workflow can structure CV facts, build an employee-case timeline, compare payroll inputs or prepare a workforce scenario. It cannot assess credibility, recognise the human meaning of a conversation or own an employment decision. The person must have the authority, evidence and time to disagree.

05 **The people function has to change itself first.**

Adoption fails when HR asks the workforce to work differently before its own administrators, recruiters and partners have tested the model in real work. Using it first exposes stale policies, weak permissions, missing escalation paths and the review burden that a demonstration does not show.

06 **HR becomes the designer of adoption, not its messenger.**

Role redesign, in-work learning and workforce participation become part of the function's operating responsibility. Legal, IT, finance and functional leaders still own their decisions, but HR makes the change concrete at the level of tasks, skills and management practice.

These six beliefs are not an argument for replacing people. They are positions about giving consequential human judgment better preparation, clearer boundaries and more of the working week.

Roles, rhythm, and where it *fails*.

HR administrators become exception managers and service designers. Recruiters spend less time moving information and more time testing judgment, supporting candidates and working with hiring managers. HR partners become workforce and role designers. Learning roles move from course administration toward coaching inside real work. The HR systems owner becomes a product owner for permissions, evaluation and agent performance.

The team needs process mapping, data interpretation, evidence checking, privacy judgment, prompt and tool design, change facilitation and enough technical fluency to challenge vendors. Recruiters and managers need specific training on automation bias and meaningful human oversight. Employees need a real way to inspect and correct skills suggestions made from their work.

The rhythm

DOCUMENTS ONLY

A sourced workflow changes one HR process

6–12 MONTHS

Live read and write access alters the team's operating rhythm

MONTHLY

Workforce scenarios, role-task maps and employee-facing answers are reviewed

BY 2028

Service design, manager coaching and workforce analysis are established responsibilities

The sequence reflects policy ownership, data cleanup, identity, permissions, integration, consultation and controls. Model development is not the limiting factor.

WHERE IT FAILS Stale policies. Weak ownership of source material. Broad service-account access. Poor HRIS data. Rubber-stamp oversight. Missing escalation paths. Sensitive material retrieved too widely. Review work added on top of the old process. Benefits measured by team size rather than capacity moved into better work. And the commonest of all: HR asks everyone else to change before its own team does.

Involve the people whose work changes while the design can still change. Bring employees, managers and their representatives into role and workflow design before the operating decision is fixed. That is the difference between introducing a tool and changing how the company works.

Twelve questions for the HR and People *leader*.

- 1 Every employee could receive a current policy answer with the source attached. Which questions should your HR colleague answer at any hour?
- 2 Managers could prepare an employment case from a complete timeline instead of searching email. Which cases currently consume the most reconstruction time?
- 3 Every new hire could receive an onboarding plan based on role, location and actual progress. Where do new hires most often lose momentum today?
- 4 Recruiting coordination could run continuously while recruiters spend more time with candidates. Which hiring steps create waiting without improving the decision?
- 5 Each interview could use the same evidence criteria while a named manager still makes the choice. How much variation exists between your hiring managers?
- 6 Skills profiles could suggest updates from completed work and learning, with each employee confirming them. Which workforce decisions are weakened by stale skills data?
- 7 Each role could be mapped into work that runs through a workflow, work supported by an agent, work retired and work expanded. Which role should be examined first, with its people and representatives involved before the design is fixed?
- 8 Workforce plans could update monthly with finance and operating demand instead of once a year. Which staffing assumption becomes outdated fastest?
- 9 Payroll inputs could be checked continuously and exceptions prepared before cutoff. Which recurring correction creates the most avoidable work?
- 10 Departing employees could leave behind a structured handover drawn from approved material. Which knowledge would hurt most if its owner left next month?
- 11 Managers could receive a weekly people brief covering overdue actions, new starters and development commitments. Which management responsibilities remain invisible until something goes wrong?
- 12 Learning could arrive inside real work rather than through a generic course catalogue. Which capability does the company need people to practise every week?

These are the questions the programme is built to answer with the people who run the function and the people whose work changes, rather than from the outside.