

6 Ways to Make Redundant HR Tasks A Thing of The Past

HR Executive | Elissa Tucker | December 17, 2024

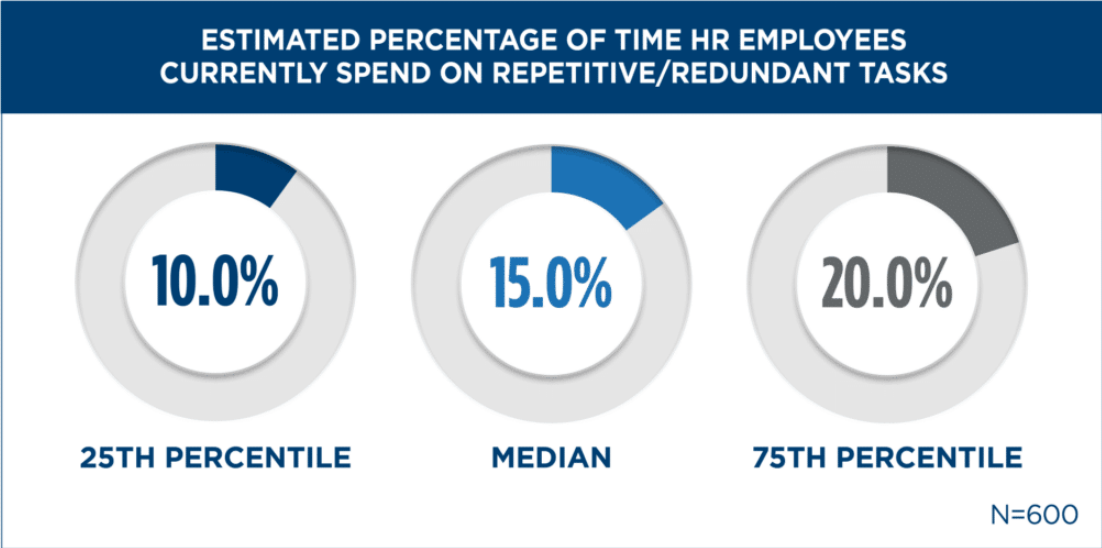
From reskilling employees to cultivating new talent pipelines and helping to drive better retention, HR has more opportunities than ever today to step into the spotlight as a strategic partner that helps drive value for organizations. As these business-critical demands on HR’s time grow, the drive to remove repetitive and redundant HR processes is taking on new urgency.

After breaking down cross-industry data for the estimated percentage of time that HR employees spend on such nonvalue-added tasks, we highlight strategies and success factors that we’ve seen leading HR functions use to take this work off HR’s plate.

Many HR functions lose a full day per week to nonvalue-added work

Repetitive HR tasks like managing applicant information, gathering workforce data and generating new hire offers are all part of HR’s job. However, when this work takes up too much time, HR has less capacity for high-value work that helps move the business forward; meanwhile, it’s often unclear who should be doing what when it comes to redundant work.

Unfortunately, we found that many HR functions are battling for the time to carry out strategic, value-added work for the business. HR functions at the 75th percentile estimate that they spend 20% of their time—the equivalent of an eight-hour workday in a 40-hour week—on repetitive or redundant tasks. HR functions at the median spend 15% of their time on these tasks, while those at the 25th percentile spend 10%.



A full workday, or even six hours of a workday (for HR functions at the median), is a lot of time for HR to spend on repetitive or redundant work. This not only creates the risk of wasting time and money but also means HR has less time for strategic activities like workforce planning or enhancing employee engagement. HR staff—who didn't get into this work to be carrying out redundant or repetitive tasks—are also likely to be dissatisfied with this kind of environment. Getting this work off HR's plate is good for everyone.

How to measure time spent on redundant HR work

It's important to take a baseline reading for this measure if you don't yet have one. Tracking this measure can help HR:

- Build a business case for new tools to boost efficiency.
- Benchmark internally to find best practices and improvement opportunities.
- Track improvements over time to ensure that waste isn't creeping back into HR processes.

There are several different ways you can go about building an estimate of how much time you spend on repetitive or redundant work in HR:

- Use time recording or carryout time usage studies in HR.
- Analyze inputs like HR call volume, transaction volume, the number of questions HR answers and the number of errors that require rework in transactional processes.
- Carry out interviews with HR staff and HR stakeholders, which can help reveal pain points, bottlenecks or inefficiencies in how work is executed.

Setting targets and benchmarking

Once you have a good sense of where you stand today, set a target percentage that makes sense for your organization and HR function. There are several factors you should consider as you set your target and look for benchmarking peers:

- Your location matters because local laws and regulations can add extra paperwork or compliance requirements to HR tasks.
- Industry also plays a role in shaping what you can realistically expect. For example, we found that government and military organizations trend higher than the cross-industry sample because of unique administrative requirements.
- Your organization's size (whether in terms of revenue or headcount) can also shape what your readings look like. While large organizations can often realize economies of scale for greater efficiency, those that operate in more than one country may need HR to remain more decentralized.
- Consider your HR operating model as you look for benchmarking partners. If you use shared services for HR, compare yourself to other organizations that do so as well.

Broadly speaking, you should try to find the organizations and HR functions that most closely match your own to develop a realistic sense of what “good” looks like and what’s possible for you.

Getting nonvalue-added work off HR’s plate

Below are four strategies that we’ve seen leading HR functions use to gain time for more strategic and value-added work in HR.

1. Work to improve HR processes before adopting new technology.

HR software vendors often make big promises about what their products can do, but even the best tools won’t fix broken processes and inefficient workflows. If you need to reduce the amount of nonvalue-added work in HR, start by getting your process house in order first.

For example, activities like process mapping help organizations understand their processes on a granular level so they can discover improvement opportunities, work toward greater process standardization and eliminate process steps that are unnecessary and redundant. Small but sustainable process improvements can add up to significant gains even before you start looking into automation or AI.

2. Implement governance for HR processes.

Process governance is concerned with roles, responsibilities and accountability for process work and is another important element you should put in place if you don’t have it already. HR’s capacity can quickly shrink when multiple groups (for example, global shared services and local HR teams) carry out the same work because it isn’t clear who is responsible for a process. Roles like process owner are also important because someone needs to be accountable for sustaining and reinforcing any improvements you make and ensuring that waste doesn’t creep back into HR processes.

3. Centralize HR to the extent that you can.

Centralizing HR processes with a shared services model is another effective way to reduce repetitive or redundant work. Shared service teams often develop expertise in transactional HR processes that enables them to eliminate manual steps and gain greater efficiency through tools like automation.

If you need HR to stay more decentralized, outsourcing high-volume processes like payroll or benefits administration is another effective way to reduce the amount of transactional work that your HR team needs to carry out.

4. Build on improvements with automation and AI.

Once you’ve improved your processes by eliminating unnecessary process steps and implementing governance, look for opportunities to build on those gains by adding technology. Tools with embedded automation and AI are more accessible and affordable than ever, even for smaller organizations.

Evaluate the cost and benefits of using these tools for employee or manager self-service. For example, some organizations are already rolling out AI-based self-service agents that can answer basic policy questions and retrieve information for employees. Many newer recruiting tools can also automate and streamline repetitive tasks like offer letter generation and perform initial applicant screening. Applying technology in these ways will help to free up time for human HR representatives to carry out more complex requests for employees and provide decision-making support for the business.

Tips for success

We've found that the following practices are critical success factors for cutting down on repetitive or redundant work in HR.

Before jumping into an approach, be sure to speak with employees who perform the process as well as those who are stakeholders of the process. Confirm that what you are seeing is indeed repetitive and redundant work; gather information on how each group thinks things could be improved; and involve these groups when proposing and designing changes.

Rather than simply pushing work outside of HR onto employees or managers, consider the needs of all your stakeholders and work to make the change a win for everyone.

Start with some smaller pilot projects that can result in quick wins. Share success stories about these projects to build momentum and buy-in for larger projects.

Frame your business case in terms of benefits that leaders care about, like cost savings and more time for HR to strategically partner with the business.

Create a change management plan that includes training and resources for any staff who will need to carry out work differently going forward.

Don't reinvent the wheel when it comes to process improvement or change management. Partner with process, transformation or change management teams if your organization has them.