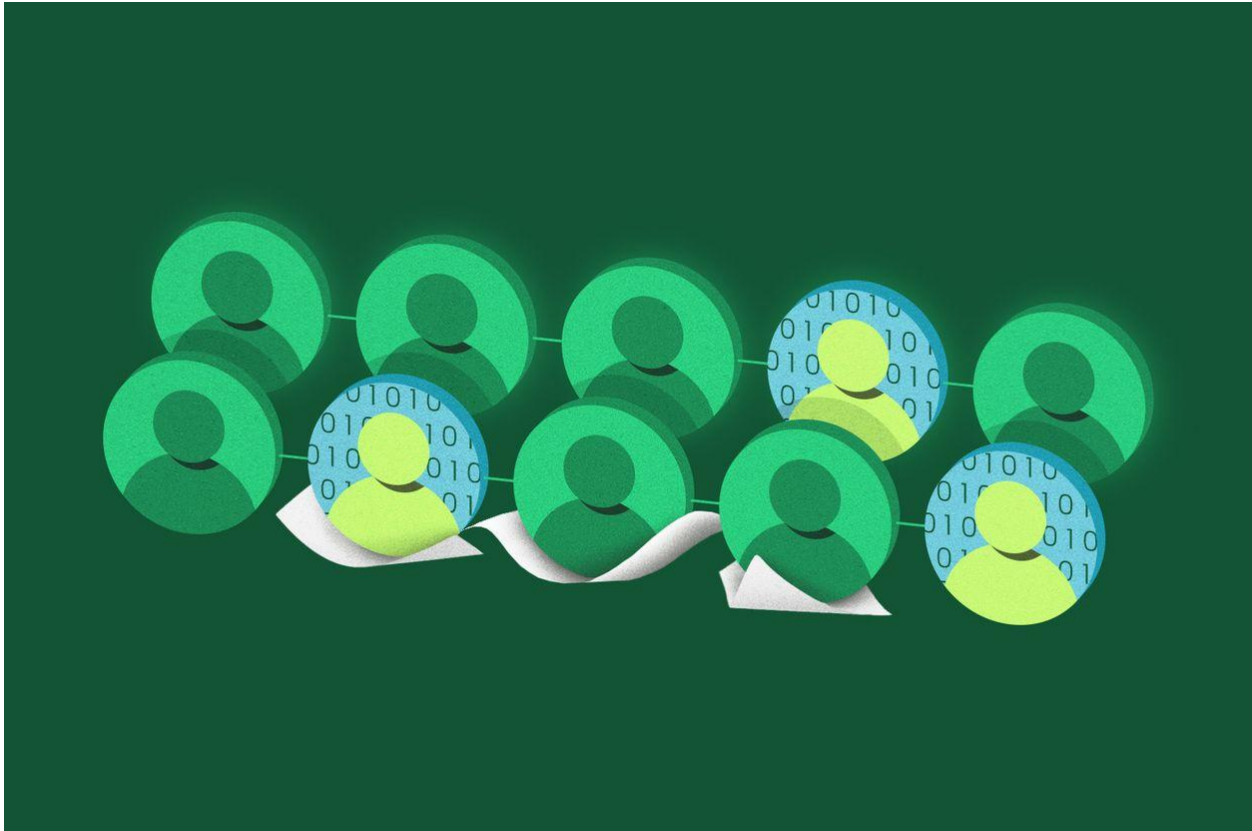


HR Teams Are Grappling with the Human-to-AI Continuum

HR Brew | Adam DeRose | April 18, 2025

As AI agents enter the workplace, HR is helping business redefine 'talent'



Anna Kim

As new AI tools become more sophisticated and as technologists better tune them to the needs of their organizations, HR and business leaders are grappling with new considerations about who or what is doing that work.

AI tools can already tackle really simple tasks well, and they are getting more complex, according to Bryan Ackermann, head of AI strategy and transformation at Korn Ferry. What's now considered "talent" in the world of work is (again) evolving as organizations look to leverage more agentic AI solutions to increase efficiencies and productivity.

Then there are HR tech systems, such as Workday's new AI agent system of record, which recognize this shift and are building governance tools inside their HCMs. Last December, AI developers also built Job For Agents, a job board-type website aimed at connecting AI engineers who "didn't know where to deploy their agents" and for companies that "didn't know what AI could actually achieve." (No, no robots are applying to positions...yet).

"Now you've got both sides of the talent pipeline beginning to think about agents in the same breath as they would think about a full-timer, a part-timer, a temp, a contractor," Ackermann said.

The human-AI continuum. HR's "entire philosophy, set of processes, set of technologies, is about the orchestration of human talent," but now, the function is evolving to incorporate and govern something other than just the humans inside the business, he said.

Ackermann told HR Brew that organizations are currently trying to figure out who would be the best owner of this job whether that be "a human, a human powered by AI, an agent supervised by humans...or AI?"

Every task within a role will fall somewhere along that human-to-AI continuum. Current job architectures face transformation, and tasks will begin to be assessed based on how much a human is required to perform them. That means some tasks will still be reserved for flesh-and-blood talent, some will be exclusively run by ones-and-zeros talent, and many more will fall somewhere in between.

"That is going to change the philosophy of HR, the roles within HR," Ackermann said, noting that it's not yet clear when exactly, or to what extent, this shift will occur. But this future requires HR leaders to engage directly with other C-suite leaders in workforce design now in the development and procurement stage of the technology.

While talent acquisition teams have traditionally viewed talent through a "buy, borrow, build," and later "bot" lens, the leapfrogging AI technology in recent years opened up a world where new "bot" talent solutions have become more flexible and easier to build and deploy. So the consideration of what work requires what type of talent is more complex, and HR leaders should actively be involved in the decision making process for these considerations, according to HR experts, for the good of the organization and employees alike.

"If [HR pros] delegate to somebody else the decision of 'is it a human or not?'...I don't know how HR can do the job for the humans if they aren't participatory in the process of deciding whether or not a particular role is staffed by a human or a bot or in some combination," Ackermann said.

"Not tech, but a talent type." Instead of viewing new AI tools as a technological investment, Steven Kirz, operations excellence senior partner at West Monroe, encouraged HR leaders and businesses to think of these investments as productivity boosters rather than as new technology.

"When you think about AI as technology, you've stepped on a landmine," he said. "Because, in order to justify investment in technologies, you're going to have to fire people."

If companies see AI tools as supporting existing "talent augmenters," they don't need to cut down on labor to justify the investment in AI, because the productivity gains justify the investment on their own.

HR's role in L&D is critical to create a workforce of "prompt engineering superstars" who are "using prompt engineering as often as they're using [Microsoft] Excel, PowerPoint or Word." in order to reap the productivity gains possible with the booster. HR's culture and L&D work must begin now, Kirz suggested.

That AI-enabled workforce will be educated on AI, primed to continue learning with the technology, and excited about the work they can achieve with an assist from their ones-and-zeros digital "intern," he said.

"When people realize that they're not getting fired by using AI, but they're actually more valuable and are able to do more. They come up with new ideas," Kirz said.

AI literacy and prompt engineering skilling are both critical for leveling up employees and allowing them ownership over the AI transformation of their work. As a result, Kirz said, new ideas for workflows and AI use-cases can be better identified and developed to fit the unique needs of their role, suggesting that employees can potentially do this work better than what the IT staff or an AI consultant could even design, because they're the actual humans delivering the work.

"The investment is tiny compared to the return from that productivity and creating that AI adaptive workforce, that's the big 'Aha,'" Kirz said. "That's what people have been getting wrong."