HR transformation is not an HR project

From platform delivery to business outcomes

A new platform may modernise HR delivery. It will not fix poor process design or settle who owns the result.

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HR's mandate now reaches beyond the function

HR's role has widened quickly. Local administration now sits within a larger job: managing a global workforce, improving how employees use HR services and giving leaders a clearer view of skills and cost.

That wider job does not make the basics less important. Payroll must run and employee data must be right in every country. Business leaders expect those services to work without consuming most of HR's time.

When HR spends the week correcting transactions and chasing approvals, work on skills and workforce planning gets squeezed out. Good workforce data and easy-to-use digital service are now basic expectations. Continuous learning is becoming one too.

Several pressures are landing at once

HR is not dealing with one isolated problem. Digital change is reshaping the work while talent shortages and cost pressure narrow the room for error. Global growth adds another layer.

Teams are introducing automation and AI while employees and managers learn new tools. They must also recruit skills that are hard to find and help the existing workforce adapt.

Across countries, common processes and dependable data matter. So do local payroll rules, labour law, privacy and working practices. Ignore those differences and the model breaks. Design around every local preference and it will never scale.

Employees compare HR service with the banking and travel apps they use at home. Finance leaders look for lower cost and better control. HR has to meet both expectations. A cheaper service that is harder to use only moves the work back to managers and local HR teams.

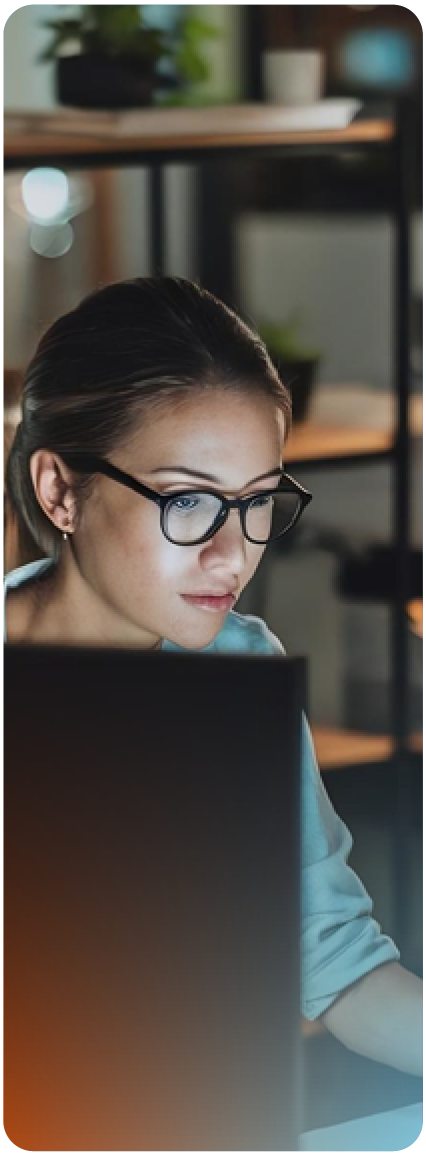
Go-live is a poor measure of success

Many programmes lose value before a platform is selected. Leaders ask which system to buy before they agree what should improve.

That leaves go-live as the only visible measure. The programme launches on time and within budget, yet managers still keep their own spreadsheets, local teams work around the new process and HR assembles data by hand to answer a basic workforce question. The project plan is complete. The business case is not.

Technology gets too much credit. It can remove manual work, but it cannot fix unclear ownership or an approval that serves no purpose. Digitising a bad process only makes it move faster.

The real work starts before configuration. Teams need to remove steps that no longer serve a purpose, then decide where one common process will work and where local law demands something different. HR cannot settle those choices alone. Finance, IT, legal and business leaders own parts of the process, so they must own the trade-offs.



Adoption needs the same attention as design. New roles and service routes take time to settle. If the programme declares victory at launch, people return to familiar workarounds.

Measure what happens after go-live. Manager self-service, response time and data quality show whether the service is working. Time to hire and the speed of workforce decisions show whether the business is getting value.

A programme can go live on time and still miss its business case.

A partner should bring challenge, not comfort

A transformation partner should make the organisation think harder. A partner who validates every existing process is not a partner. They are a vendor.

Accountability starts before delivery. Agree the outcomes and how they will be measured before design decisions become difficult. Delivery against a plan is not the same as delivery of results.

Challenge must also survive contact with local reality. Anyone can draw one global model on a slide. The harder test is whether it works with local payroll, regulation and language without turning every exception into a permanent variation.

Experience matters. So does knowing when the data proves it wrong. Process data and service performance should settle design arguments, not instinct dressed up as experience. After launch, the partner should show what is working and what will change next.

AI changes the service, not the fundamentals

AI will become part of almost every HR process over the next three years. Its value will be practical: removing routine work without weakening judgement or control. Poor data will still produce poor decisions, and local regulation will still set the boundaries.

For most organisations, the first gains will look ordinary. Better case routing and faster access to accurate policy information will release time now lost to administration. That matters more than a flashy pilot that never scales.

The larger shift will be in decision-making. Global leaders will expect payroll, skills, workforce cost and service demand in one connected view. A report that arrives after a location or investment decision is made is too late. Workforce data has to enter the decision while there is still time to change it.

Employee experience cannot be traded away for a lower unit cost. A service that confuses employees creates more work for managers, HR and payroll. Adoption and response time belong on the operating scorecard.

Operating models will become more modular. Organisations will want to change one service component without rebuilding the rest. That flexibility only works when standards are clear and data is trusted. Otherwise, modularity becomes fragmentation with a better name.

Business outcomes must come before technology

Before a platform dictates the answer, a CHRO starting a transformation in 2026 should settle the business case and the operating choices behind it.

Define the outcome first:
Name the business problem in plain terms and decide how progress will be measured. If the objective is only to implement a platform, the programme is not ready.

Redesign before digitising:
Remove work that no longer serves a purpose. Standardise where it improves the service, and preserve local variation only where law or a clear business need demands it.

Plan for the service after go-live:
Keep the measures visible and fix what is not working. HR should orchestrate the change, but business leaders must make decisions and hold their teams to the new ways of working.

Regulations and employee expectations change. New tools alter what the service can do. Continuous improvement belongs in the model from the start.

The business case is proven after go-live

A launch proves that the project team delivered. Value becomes visible later, when managers use the service without workarounds and HR has better information at the point of decision.

“HR transformation is not an HR project. It is a business transformation enabled by HR.”

Shiju Soman
Vice President
HR Services & Transformation, Zalaris

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