

CATEGORY REPORT Q2 / 2026

# Future of Work & Hybrid Workforce Management



*The Insight*  
COLLECTIVE

LEAD GENERATION  
FOR B2B TECHNOLOGY  
BRANDS

## INTRODUCTION

*Buying decisions in the HR technology category are being shaped by a new set of pressures — compliance, classification, operational control, and what it takes to manage a distributed workforce well.*

*This report maps where demand is building, how brands are responding, and where the white space is.*

# 86%

of employers expect AI to transform their business by 2030

WEF FUTURE OF JOBS 2025

# +507%

growth in Worker Classification intent — fastest-rising buyer concern in category

BOMBORA, 90 DAYS TO JUNE 2026

# 93%

of UK employees would take action if required back full-time

ITPRO

# 63%

of employers say the skills gap is the biggest barrier to transformation

WEF FUTURE OF JOBS 2025

# Four forces reshaping demand

Compliance deadlines, rising AI expectations, and a workforce operating model that has settled into something permanent are all landing at once — pulling buyer attention toward operational specificity and compliance readiness at scale.

## AI WORKFLOWS

# 81%

**OF LEADERS EXPECT  
AI AGENTS IN COMPANY  
STRATEGY WITHIN  
12–18 MONTHS**

MICROSOFT WORK TREND INDEX 2025

*AI-powered features have moved  
from differentiator to expectation*

Buyers expect AI as standard — the question is what it does. Brands that show AI improving onboarding, compliance checks, or workforce planning will win trust. Those still leading with “AI-powered” as a claim will not.

## COMPLIANCE PRESSURE

# 2026

**DEADLINE FOR EU PAY  
TRANSPARENCY  
DIRECTIVE  
TRANSPOSITION INTO  
NATIONAL LAW**

*Compliance is now a live  
workforce-management problem*

EOR, payroll, and HRIS providers need to show they can carry classification, pay transparency, and employment obligations across multiple markets — actively and accurately. The EU AI Act adds a second compliance layer for vendors using automated HR decision-making.

## HYBRID WORKING

# 74%

**of UK employees prefer  
hybrid — 93% would act if  
required back full-time**

ITPro

*Hybrid work means balancing flexibility  
with operational control*

Employees expect flexibility; businesses need consistency. The tension is especially sharp in the UK and EU, where flexible working rights carry legal weight. Hybrid working is a retention issue as much as an operational one — and buyers are asking how to make both work at scale.

## SKILLS VOLATILITY

# 39%

**of workers' existing  
skills will be transformed  
or outdated by 2030**

WEF

*Skills are changing faster than  
most workforce plans*

With 59% of workers needing retraining by 2030, HR platforms are increasingly assessed on how well they connect workforce planning, talent mobility, and skills visibility. The skills data boundary between LMS and HRIS remains largely unresolved — and represents a growing buyer frustration.

# AI in HR is now a *compliance* question as much as an *efficiency* one.

The EU AI Act classifies automated HR decision-making — hiring, performance assessment, termination — as high-risk AI use. This means audit trails, human oversight requirements, and transparency obligations, landing in the same window as the Pay Transparency Directive. Vendors who frame AI as a workflow tool without addressing the compliance dimension are behind the buyer conversation.

1

#### ONBOARDING AUTOMATION

Document collection, right-to-work checks, localised policy delivery. Specific, auditable, and measurable.

2

#### COMPLIANCE MONITORING

Flagging classification drift, pay gap anomalies, and jurisdiction-specific threshold breaches in real time.

3

#### WORKFORCE PLANNING SIGNALS

Skills gap detection, attrition modelling, and headcount forecasting — connected to live workforce data, not static spreadsheets.

4

#### PAYROLL ANOMALY DETECTION

Identifying errors, inconsistencies, and compliance deviations before payroll runs — not after a failed audit.

81%

OF LEADERS EXPECT AI AGENTS IN COMPANY STRATEGY WITHIN 12–18 MONTHS · MICROSOFT WORK TREND INDEX 2025

11%

SAY MEASUREMENT OF AI IMPACT IS CURRENTLY A CORE STRENGTH



# What buyers are actively researching

Intent data shows which topics buyers are researching before a vendor enters the conversation. The four areas below are generating the highest research volumes and sharpest growth in the category right now.

## CLASSIFICATION RISK

+507% INTENT

*Which employment model is right for our international workforce?*

Businesses are unsure whether international workers should be contractors, employees, or EOR hires. The core concern is misclassification exposure — taxes, benefits, and local obligations when a contractor starts to look like an employee.

BRANDS THAT HELP BUYERS CHOOSE THE RIGHT MODEL — RATHER THAN EXPLAIN WHAT AN EOR IS — ARE BETTER PLACED TO EARN TRUST AT THIS STAGE.

## COMPLEX PAYROLL

HIGHEST VOLUME

*How do we pay people accurately across multiple markets?*

Multi-country payroll combines currencies, tax rules, local compliance, and outsourcing decisions into a single operational risk. It is the category's strongest intent signal by volume.

IF YOUR PAYROLL NARRATIVE STOPS AT SPEED AND EFFICIENCY, BUYERS WILL ASSUME YOU ARE NOT READY FOR ACCURACY, ESCALATION, AND FAILURE RECOVERY.

+507%

WORKER  
CLASSIFICATION  
INTENT GROWTH

184K

BUSINESSES  
RESEARCHING  
PAYROLL  
MANAGEMENT

+490%

CONTRACT  
MANAGEMENT  
INTENT GROWTH

33K

BUSINESSES  
RESEARCHING  
GLOBAL PAYROLL

## HYBRID WORKING

+52% ONBOARDING

*How do we manage a distributed workforce consistently?*

Employees want flexibility; employers need consistency — and that gap is where the operational pain sits. With Remote Onboarding intent up 52%, brands offering practical operating guidance are addressing demand the wider category has largely left open.

THE ACTIVE BUYER QUESTION IS HOW TO ONBOARD, COLLABORATE, AND MANAGE POLICY COHERENTLY ACROSS DISTRIBUTED TEAMS.

53.7K

BUSINESSES  
RESEARCHING  
REMOTE  
WORKING

+52%

REMOTE  
ONBOARDING  
INTENT GROWTH

## WORKFORCE CONTROL

+52% UNIFIED OPS

*How do we get a clear view across our teams, systems, and data?*

Buyers want visibility across global teams, payroll, and HR systems. Frustration centres on fragmented tooling, being charged for basic reporting functions, and a lack of control over workforce data.

UNIFICATION MESSAGING IS WELL COVERED. THE GAP IS CONTENT ON DATA OWNERSHIP, REPORTING QUALITY, AND WHAT SWITCHING PROVIDERS ACTUALLY INVOLVES.

+57%

UNIFIED  
OPERATIONS  
INTENT GROWTH

+56%

GLOBAL  
WORKFORCE  
MANAGEMENT  
INTENT GROWTH



## REGIONAL CONTEXT — CLASSIFICATION &amp; COMPLIANCE RISK

| TOPIC                      | AMERICAS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | EMEA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | APAC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BUYING PRESSURE</b>     | Cross-border payroll and workforce planning remain difficult. PayrollOrg's 2025 survey ranked the United States and Canada as the two most difficult countries in which to pay employees. The World Economic Forum also estimates that 67% of the workforce in Northern America will need upskilling or reskilling by 2030. | Employers are managing payroll, flexible work and workforce data against a concentrated compliance timetable. The EU Pay Transparency Directive reached its transposition deadline on June 7, 2026, bringing pay ranges, employee information rights and staged pay gap reporting into implementation planning. | Skills visibility and workforce agility are moving higher on the HR agenda. Aon's 2025 APAC survey found that 90% of organizations consider skills initiatives highly important, while 61% have implemented skills-based programs.                                                    |
| <b>STRUCTURAL TRIGGER</b>  | Worker classification is still moving. In February 2026, the U.S. Department of Labor proposed replacing its 2024 independent contractor rule, while state and local tests continue to apply alongside federal standards.                                                                                                   | Regulation increasingly connects employment status, pay transparency and workforce management. The EU Platform Work Directive adds procedures for determining employment status, while UK employees can request flexible working from their first day.                                                          | Flexible work governance is becoming more formal in parts of the region. Singapore's guidelines require employers to consider formal flexible work requests and respond within two months, while Australia's right to disconnect now applies to employees of businesses of all sizes. |
| <b>BUYER CONCERN</b>       | How to classify, pay and develop workers consistently across jurisdictions without losing local compliance, auditability or control over workforce data.                                                                                                                                                                    | How to divide compliance responsibilities across ATS, HRIS and payroll systems while applying consistent policies across markets with different employment protections.                                                                                                                                         | How to manage distributed teams across markets with different working-time, payroll and employment rules while maintaining consistent employee experience and reporting.                                                                                                              |
| <b>CONTENT OPPORTUNITY</b> | Create regional decision guides that map classification tests, payroll responsibilities and contractor-to-employee transitions, supported by practical skills and workforce reporting frameworks.                                                                                                                           | Provide role-based compliance maps, implementation timelines and stack responsibility guides that show which system owns each requirement and what evidence employers need to retain.                                                                                                                           | Offer modular policy templates, local compliance checklists and workforce data models that can adapt by market without fragmenting payroll, reporting or onboarding.                                                                                                                  |

2026

EU DEADLINE

### The Pay Transparency Directive: What it demands from your stack

The directive requires employers to publish pay ranges at hiring, report gender pay gaps for organisations with 100+ employees, and give employees the right to information about pay criteria. No single product category owns full compliance — the obligation sits across ATS, HRIS, and payroll. Buyers are asking which tool handles which part, and almost no vendor content answers that directly.

## 04. BRAND COVERAGE

# Where brands are active — and where the gaps are

Coverage is strongest where the buying problem is most established, and weakest where buyer attention is growing fastest. The gap isn't a lack of content — it's a lack of the right kind.

| TOPIC               | SCORE | CURRENT BRAND ANGLE                                                                                                                         | CONTENT OPPORTUNITY                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Complex Payroll     | 8/10  | Brands focus on consolidation, compliance visibility, and cross-border payments.                                                            | Cost transparency, reporting quality, and what happens when payroll fails — including real failure scenarios and recovery timelines.                         |
| Classification Risk | 7/10  | Risk and compliance are covered, but typically through product capability rather than buyer decision-making.                                | Contractor vs EOR decision guides, role-based scenarios, and regional comparison content (US vs EU classification rules).                                    |
| Workforce Control   | 7/10  | Platform messaging focuses on unified data, automation, and visibility.                                                                     | Reporting consistency, vendor switching timelines and costs, and honest coverage of data ownership and portability.                                          |
| Hybrid Working      | 5/10  | Content exists but is less developed — largely owned by remote-first brands, not the wider HR tech category.                                | Hybrid onboarding playbooks, policy consistency guides, and remote employee management frameworks. The category has largely left this to specialist vendors. |
| Pay Transparency    | 4/10  | Most content explains what the EU Pay Transparency Directive requires. Almost none helps buyers decide which tool handles which obligation. | Stack-responsibility guides (what does ATS own vs HRIS vs payroll), implementation timelines, and practical compliance checklists by company size.           |

Buyers in this category face real, high-consequence decisions: which employment model to use, how to handle payroll failure, when to switch providers, and now — how to divide compliance obligations across a fragmented stack. Content that helps them work through those decisions will outperform product messaging that doesn't.

# What buyers need at each stage — and what's missing

Engagement data tells you who's paying attention. Mapping those signals to the buyer journey tells you what to give them. The category's content gaps are concentrated at the middle and late stages, where decision-making actually happens.

| STAGE                                         | BUYER QUESTION                                                             | WHAT THEY NEED                                                                                                                                                                                                   | FORMATS THAT WORK                                               | WHAT'S MISSING                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Problem Awareness</b><br>EARLY STAGE       | Are we exposed?<br>What are other companies like us doing?                 | Frameworks and diagnostics — not vendor comparisons. Buyers at this stage want to understand the shape of the problem before they're ready to evaluate solutions.                                                | RESEARCH REPORTS<br>RISK CALCULATORS<br>MARKET BENCHMARKS       | Regional risk comparison tools — especially US vs EU classification and pay transparency exposure.                                                        |
| <b>Solution Exploration</b><br>MID STAGE      | What are our options? What does each model actually cost and commit us to? | Decision guides, model comparisons, and cost calculators. Buyers researching "EOR vs PEO" or "contractor vs employee" are making structural workforce decisions — they need help comparing, not a product pitch. | COMPARISON GUIDES<br>COST CALCULATORS<br>DECISION TREES         | Contractor-to-EOR transition guides and honest total-cost-of-employment models by market — almost entirely absent from the category.                      |
| <b>Vendor Evaluation</b><br>LATE STAGE        | Can you actually do this for us?<br>What does implementation look like?    | Specificity, implementation timelines, case studies with real numbers, and integration detail. Buyers at this stage are stress-testing claims — they need evidence, not assurances.                              | CASE STUDIES<br>IMPLEMENTATION GUIDES<br>INTEGRATION CHECKLISTS | Honest switching guides — what a payroll or HRIS migration actually involves, what goes wrong, and how long it takes. High credibility, almost no supply. |
| <b>Post-Purchase</b><br>RETENTION & EXPANSION | Are we getting the most from this?<br>What should we be doing next?        | Usage maturity frameworks, benchmark data against peers, and strategic prompts for expanding scope — particularly around compliance calendar events and workforce planning cycles.                               | MATURITY FRAMEWORKS<br>COMPLIANCE CALENDARS<br>PEER BENCHMARKS  | Compliance readiness calendars tied to live legislative deadlines — the Pay Transparency Directive is the obvious anchor for 2026.                        |

# What this means for category marketers

The HR category is becoming more operational, more compliance-sensitive, and more connected. Whatever part of this arc a brand occupies, the content question is the same: are you helping buyers make better decisions, or explaining what you do?



1

## LEAD WITH PRACTICAL BUYER DECISIONS, NOT MODEL EDUCATION

Contractor vs employee vs EOR — the question buyers are asking is which one is right for them, not what each model is. Decision guides with regional specificity (US vs EU exposure) are the clearest content gap in this space.

2

## FRAME PAYROLL AS AN OPERATIONAL CONTROL STORY

Visibility, cost, accuracy, compliance, and failure prevention — not just vendor consolidation. Multi-country payroll drives the highest volume of buyer research in the category, and buyers are asking questions that product pages don't answer: what happens when payroll fails, and how long does it take to fix?

3

## OWN HYBRID WORKING BEFORE REMOTE-FIRST BRANDS CLOSE THE GAP

Onboarding, policy consistency, and employee experience across distributed teams are under-served by the wider HR tech category. Remote Onboarding intent is up 52%. This is the lowest-competition, highest-growth white space in the category right now.

4

## MAKE PAY TRANSPARENCY YOUR COMPLIANCE ANCHOR FOR 2026

The EU directive deadline creates a live, time-bound buying trigger. The buyer question — which tool in my stack handles which obligation — is almost entirely unanswered by current category content. First-mover advantage here is significant and the window is short.

5

## MAKE AI CREDIBLE WITH WORKFLOW-LEVEL PROOF POINTS

Onboarding automation, compliance monitoring, payroll anomaly detection, workforce planning signals — specific, auditable, measurable. Buyers expect AI; what they're evaluating is whether it changes a workflow or just labels one. The EU AI Act means compliance framing is now part of the AI product story, not optional.

6

## ADDRESS SWITCHING COSTS AND DATA OWNERSHIP DIRECTLY

Buyers are frustrated and very little content covers it honestly. Candour about what a migration involves, what data you own and can export, and what happens during transition builds more trust than any platform messaging. This is where late-stage trust is won or lost.

# Engagement-led research, category reports, and content strategy for B2B marketers who want to move faster than their category.

This report maps where buyer attention is concentrated, how brands are responding to it, and where the content white space is. We produce custom category reports, content gap analyses, and buyer journey audits for HR technology vendors and the agencies that represent them.

## *Next-Gen MQL*

From content consumption signals to commercial-value prediction — targeting the accounts most likely to convert and deliver CLTV.

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## *2026 B2B Marketing Effectiveness Benchmark*

Survey of 300 marketers globally on confidence, measurement, and the gap between strategy and proof.

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## *Custom Category Reports*

Commission a report for your specific market, competitor set, or buyer segment.



# Better B2B marketing starts with better insight.

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Behind every program is a collective of senior strategists, analysts, and market specialists who know your industry inside out. They identify where the demand sits and build the strategy to reach it – backed by human-verified quality assurance and a dedicated team who see your campaign through from start to finish.



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