

AI agents are starting to do the work. A new category is forming around how that work is designed.

SAP's agreement to acquire TechWolf (October 6) and Workday's launch of Work Intelligence (October 13) bring task-level analysis of work into two of the largest enterprise HR platforms. Both moves confirm demand. They address one part of a larger change: once AI agents perform steps of work, organizations have to redesign how work is assigned, staffed, controlled and changed. That problem sits between IT, HR, process and strategy, and no established software category covers it. This brief calls the category workforce design and engineering.

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Key findings

- Demand is confirmed.** Within a week, one HR platform agreed to buy task-level work analysis and another launched it. SAP describes the deal as "establishing work intelligence as a strategic SAP asset."
- The HR suites start from the job.** Workday's product breaks each job into tasks, links them to skills and shows "where AI can help, what it should augment, and what has to stay human." TechWolf's "context graph for work" maps tasks, skills and the labor market. Both feed workforce planning and reskilling.
- The operating problem starts from the work.** When an agent performs a step, the step is what matters: who or what performs it, under what authority, who answers for it, and how that assignment changes over time.
- No single function owns it.** HR plans people, IT runs systems and identities, process teams model flows, and strategy sets direction. The assignment of work between people and agents falls between them.
- For security leaders, the exposure is direct.** An agent performing a step is an identity acting with authority. Access controls govern what it can reach, not which work it was assigned or who approved that assignment.

What changes when agents do part of the work

	ESTABLISHED	WITH AGENTS
Unit of work	The job	The step; jobs split between people and agents
Capacity	Headcount	People plus agents
Accountability	The org chart	A named owner for every step, including an agent's
Access	Follows the job	Has to follow the step
Separation of duties	Among people	Among people and agents
Redesign cycle	Every few years	As fast as agents change

Two starting points

APPROACH	STARTS FROM	ANSWERS
HR suites (Workday; SAP with TechWolf)	Jobs and skills	What should this job become? A planning view anchored in HR data.
Work-first systems (e.g. NOW OS)	The process, step by step	Who or what should perform each step, under what rule, across systems?

Case in point: a work-first approach

Disclosure: Nexus of Work sponsors this brief and develops NOW OS.

Nexus of Work has worked on this approach since 2024. Its NOW OS maps a process down to the individual step, assigns each step to a named person or an agent under a published rule, runs the work that way, and routes changes through an approval board with an impact preview, keeping a hash-chained record of decisions. The first process built on it is one security leaders own, the security exception: 78 steps from intake to expiry, 68 assigned to agents and 10 held by named people at the judgment and sign-off points, with alternates when people are away. The assignment rule classes each step by the kind of work it is, weighs it against what the case puts at stake, and leaves a full trace. A peer-reviewed paper on the architecture appeared in March 2026 (ACIG), three U.S. provisional patent applications were filed in July 2026, and a public task-mapping tool is at nexusofwork.com/atlas.

Implications for security leaders

- Treat the assignment of work to agents as a control. For each step an agent performs, know the named owner, the rule that assigned it, and who approved it.
- Extend separation of duties and access reviews from people to the steps agents perform.
- Use HR-suite work intelligence for workforce planning. Plan separately for how agent work is assigned and controlled across the systems it touches.

What to watch

- The SAP–TechWolf close, expected in Q4 2026 subject to regulatory approval. TechWolf is to remain available to non-SAP customers.
- General availability of Workday Work Intelligence, now in early access for Workday HCM customers.
- Whether vendors publish how they classify tasks between people and AI, and how accurate that classification is.