FRONTIER FUNCTION GUIDE

Frontier HR: Agentic workflows, human journeys

With AI handling repetitive daily processes, business partners can be fully present for the human moments that matter most.

At Microsoft, we believe the future of work is Frontier Firms—organizations that are human-led and agent-operated, buy intelligence like it's electricity, and compound it like interest. That shift should have a profound impact on every function.

Picture an HR organization where agents anticipate needs, automate complexity, and liberate employees to concentrate on people and culture. The function evolves from managing transactions to orchestrating journeys where every stage—from hiring to development to offboarding—is streamlined and deeply human.

The Frontier model for HR transforms the role of business partners and specialists: agents handle the routine, while people lead with judgment, empathy, and strategic insight. The ideal result is a more agile, responsive, and human-centered function—one that's always learning, improving, and putting people at the center.

Becoming Frontier

HR leaders today grapple with mounting complexity, balancing transactional demands, fragmented processes, and the pressure to deliver more strategic, people-centered outcomes. The traditional HR function often finds itself bogged down by manual tasks and siloed expertise, making it difficult to respond quickly to evolving business needs and employee expectations.

Frontier HR reimagines the function around two shifts. HR becomes agent-operated and built around employee journeys—the recruitment and hiring journey, the performance and recognition process, career development, the offboarding and alumni relationship phase. It also adopts a model where human HR business partners handle a full stack of requests, supported by team of agents that operate like product owners.

On the recruitment and hiring journey, agents pre-brief hiring panels with structured insights, assemble offer packets within policy guardrails, and walk new hires through week-one logistics. For the performance and recognition process, agents run always-on performance engines, curating signals from goals, feedback, and outcomes, while humans define what great looks like and how to handle exceptions fairly.

The career development journey features pathways that are personalized and dynamic. An agent might propose a rotation and a learning sprint aligned to the skills your strategy will need two quarters from now. And for offboarding, logistics are automated while knowledge and network value are preserved, turning the process into a long-term equity loop for your brand.

The Frontier HR business partner sits at the center of it all. Instead of being a dispatcher between centers of excellence and shared services, the HR business partner becomes an orchestrator, the human in command of a team of agents. None of these agentic workflows diminish HR's humanity—they amplify it by handling the repetitive work so HR professionals can show up for the uniquely human moments.

The Frontier HR transformation

From transactional bottlenecks to agent-powered agility—HR evolves to serve the AI-first future of business.

CURRENT HR PROCESS

The "generalist" bottleneck
Tactical requests overwhelm strategic capacity

Lack of cross-domain intelligence
HR functions operate as isolated CoEs

Disjointed systems of record
HR data lives across inconsistent taxonomies

Strategic misalignment
HRBPs may not be measured by people outcomes

FRONTIER HR PROCESS

Frontier HR business partners scale via an agentic ecosystem, serving as an incubator for experimentation

AI-first model re-architects all HR data & tech platforms around critical workflows

Integrated access powered by AI unifies data models and enables natural language queries

Tech-first specialists own the agentic portfolio across all HR operations

What Frontier HR could look like

Before AI and agents, Mike's days as an HR business partner were packed with manual data pulls, endless policy checks, and constant back-and-forth between business units and centers of excellence. He spent more time tracking down information and reacting to issues than supporting people or shaping strategy. Now, with a toolkit of agents, Mike's routine is transformed: insights are delivered proactively, compliance risks are flagged early, and workforce planning scenarios are modeled for him. Instead of drowning in admin, he's free to focus on coaching leaders, designing better employee experiences, and driving real impact. When HR is powered by agents, people—not paperwork—move to the center of every decision.

A day in the life of a Frontier HR professional

The human-led, agent-operated model streamlines repetitive processes, enabling HR business partners like Mike to focus on the *human* in *human resources*.

Mike, HR business partner

9 am: Prepare for meeting with ops lead

11 am: Review team performance and skills

12 pm: Support leadership development

3 pm: Handle employee relations

4 pm: Plan workforce needs

Agentic support team

Conversation prep agent
Creates meeting briefs with sentiment and performance insights

Meeting agent
Captures meeting notes and action items

Workforce agent
Surfaces gaps in talent, readiness, and mobility

Leadership development agent
Suggests personalized growth paths and succession plans

Compliance agent
Flags risks to policy, pay equity, and labor regulations

3 key principles every Frontier function should follow

1 Make the invisible visible
Frontier functions start by mapping every step of their work, surfacing hidden bottlenecks and inefficiencies. By turning invisible processes into visible, measurable units, they enable targeted improvements and unlock new opportunities for AI-driven impact.

2 Treat AI as core infrastructure
Rather than approaching AI as a side project or innovation showcase, Frontier teams embed AI into their core processes. This means going beyond simply automating tasks. It's about fundamentally rethinking roles and redesigning workflows so that AI is integral to how work gets done, compounding business value and accelerating cycles.

3 Make experimentation a practice
There's no finish line for AI transformation. Frontier functions are always in beta, continuously experimenting, measuring, and refining their approaches. They set up structured tests, track results, and evolve roles and processes based on evidence—not assumptions—ensuring agility, accountability, and sustainable growth.

The difference between a Frontier function and everyone else is not belief—it is behavior. Frontier leaders don't wait for perfect data or a five-year plan. They make the work visible, put AI at its core, experiment and refine, and move forward.