

How Work Gets Done (Now)

Rearchitecting People Data as Signals for the Modern Workplace



workhuman*



Traditional HR dashboards are falling behind.

If you work in human resources, you probably have a dashboard. Maybe it's a polished business intelligence (BI) view; maybe it's a mental checklist of your go-to metrics for culture and performance. Headcount, turnover, time-to-fill. Engagement scores, pulse results, compliance rates.

Analytics are as old as workforces themselves. From ink-and-paper ledgers to spreadsheets to ERP systems, HR has always needed a way to explain what happened and tell a coherent story back to the business. Dashboards were a big step in that evolution. Digital transformation also scaled the mechanics. But the operating logic stayed the same: collect a lot of numbers, roll it up, and review it on a cadence.

It sounded like a solid, sustainable system, and for decades it was. Each wave of technology – from typewriter and calculator to computer and data lake – helped humans move faster and juggle more. And more. And more.

The old model has begun to crack under the weight of sheer volume. Now technology is unlocking new things and moving at a breakneck pace and leaders in and beyond HR are trying to navigate the constant and compounding change.

Three technology shifts are driving the moment for HR analytics.

1

Volume of data

Every HRIS system now produces data, and modern BI has multiplied the dashboards. Great in theory; in practice the charts keep stacking up. There aren't enough hours in the day to look at all the possible data HR have available. The dashboards become a library you rarely have time to visit.

2

Velocity of data

The velocity of the data onslaught has become head-spinning. The sheer speed shrinks the shelf life of data, as analytics quickly become archaeology. The numbers are good to show trends, but when last quarter already feels like ancient history they are less helpful in decision-making.

3

Artificial Intelligence

AI has changed what data can do. It can read what people write, connect patterns across systems, and turn noise into narrative. On the fly, AI summarizes what changed, flags risk, and can even propose next steps or routes insight to the right owner while work is still in motion.

Put together, these shifts explain the tension leaders feel: the data pool is bigger, faster, and closer to the work – yet we’re still consuming it in tidy boxes and line charts. Dashboards are starting to look less like a solution and more like a constraint. Which raises the real question:

Have the dashboards we built to solve yesterday’s challenges now become the challenge themselves?

Perhaps it’s time to take people data out of the dashboard – out of static pages and into the flow of decisions – so leaders can act while the moment still matters.

A modern window on people data

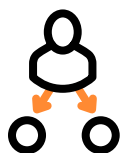
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The state of play: dashboards by the numbers

Most organizations are still figuring out how to evolve their people analytics. The reality is, few HR executives come from an analytics background, and most are managing many competing priorities.

In the 2024 SHRM People Analytics in HR, SHRM found that **71% of HR executives who use analytics say it's essential to their strategy, yet only 58% of practitioners agree that they use to make decisions at all levels.** Most teams still build around backward-looking reports, and according to SHRM, only 4% are operating predictively.

What this looks like inside the org



Operational and advanced reporting dominate.

According to SHRM, 77% of HR reporting is still at a level that looks only at “what happened” and simple relationships.



Consumption is the choke point.

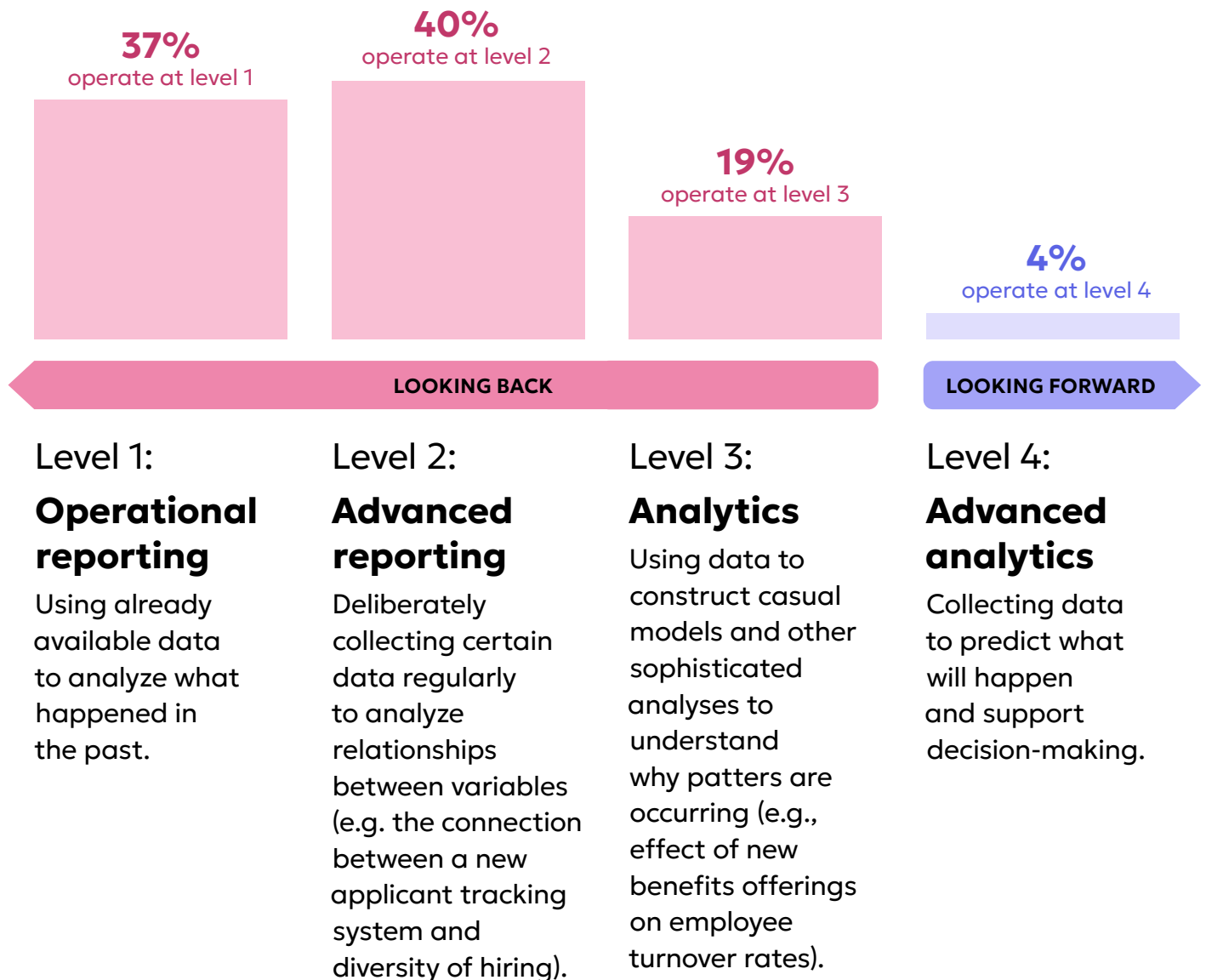
BI has multiplied the tiles; but if anything, we have less human bandwidth to look at them. HR teams are curating reporting libraries no one can fully read.



Decisions happen elsewhere

Dashboards live in portals that may not be accessible to people across the organization; decisions live in conversations and workflows. That separation creates lag or knowledge gaps.

According to SHRM, organizations using people analytics are operating at the following levels of sophistication



Most activity sits in levels 1 & 2 – reporting, not guidance.

Source: 2024 SHRM People Analytics in HR, analytics maturity model (popularized by Bersin by Deloitte)

Why dashboards don't turn into decisions

A huge volume of data has been available to HR for some time, but only with AI do we have a handling system that can finally manage and understand it at scale. Dashboards were excellent at summarizing, but in an era of real-time work, they are a tax on attention.

They're stuck in time

Useful for trend stories, but late to the moment when choices are made.

They're siloed

Data sits "over there," instead of inside the flow where managers plan, assign, recognize, and course-correct.

They flatten nuance

The most valuable people data arrives as text and context. When we turn it into numbers (as we have to do to squeeze it into dashboards), we strip away a lot of the signal.

“Dashboards are a great rear-view mirror. But I want foglights – live, people-driven signals that cut through the mist and reveal skills, influence, and risk so managers can coach, recognize, and act before the moment is gone.”



KeyAnna Schmiedl
Chief Human Experience Officer
Workhuman

Now, AI's ability to collect and analyze data at scale is challenging both how we think about people data, and how to center it in the business in two ways:

1

The way we **look at data** no longer fits the volume and sophistication of data we have available.

Dashboards were built to solve for limited time and productivity. But in the AI Age, processing data is no longer a limitation. We can quickly analyze data instantly and get answers to the questions we have in real time. The new constraint here is signal integrity – or finding a source of real, trustworthy human signals.

2

The way we **use data** no longer fits the continuous stream of data we have available in real time.

In the past, all data had to be routed into charts to be understood. Now we have the capacity to draw qualitative insights from data and serve those insights up where and when they matter. With so many insights available, the new constraint is now our time and attention. Now, we don't need to hunt down a chart. Instead, data can be surfaced as signals in the flow of work, or by simply asking a question.

The shift: from dashboards to human signals

Cramming data into the constrictive boxes of dashboards simply isn't a good use of AI's capabilities. It's part of a larger problem of trying to fit AI into the old way of work – and failing.

In fact, according to a [2025 MIT study](#), a **\$30–40 billion annual investment** into GenAI is showing

zero P&L impact

for 95% of organizations who use it.

For AI to deliver results, that study argues, companies must focus on fixing “brittle workflows, lack of contextual learning, and misalignment with day-to-day operations.” In other words, we need signals that leverage AI's strengths, and move insights where they can actually be adopted and used.

Activate insights by making the shift

	Dashboards	Human signals
 From living in:	BI portals	to: Day-to-day work tools
 From arriving on:	Monthly or quarterly cycles	to: Real time
 From containing:	Aggregated numbers	to: Actionable interpreted findings
 From serving:	HR, COEs, and executives	to: All employees

Reimagining & democratizing insights

If we think about the real value of data as human signals, then those insights are suddenly no longer just the purview of HR. They become democratized and can touch everyone.



Executives

HR can now access insights on behavior, attitudes and beliefs and turn it into high level decision-ready and on-demand insights.



Managers

HR can now access just-in-time insights in the flow of work that help managers manage and understand the risks and capabilities within their organizing.



Employees

If every recognition is a data point, every data point is also a story. By atomizing those stories into the flow of work, HR teams can turn them into powerful signals that influence emotion and behavior.

Here, with solutions like Workhuman, we can move people insights from the margins of HR reporting and into the center of business intelligence. Data can flow in real time, around and through the way we observe and manage, and become exponentially more useful and powerful.

Data hygiene: start with the right fuel

Putting people data in the flow of work help us steer what happens next. But before we “operationalize” data, we have to ask a blunter question: what data, exactly, are we operationalizing?

Not all people data are created equal, and **weak inputs will cripple AI**.

Gartner has estimated that

85% of AI initiatives fail

primarily because the
data is low-quality
or not relevant to the task.

If we want guidance we can trust, **what we feed AI must be changed**.

The **problem** with most people data

It's late	Reviews, surveys, and quarterly exports arrive after decisions have already been made.
It's thin	If we compress rich human stories into numeric rollups, we lose the “how” and “with whom” that leaders actually need.
It's patchy	Participation isn't universal, so entire teams, shifts, or regions disappear from view.
It's biased	Manager-filtered inputs and optional self-reports skew toward the loudest voices or the best writers.
It's fragmented	Signals live in different systems with different owners, so no one sees the pattern until it's old news.
It's synthetic or speculative	Mining email or chat without intent invites ethical risk and noisy inferences—then AI trains on that noise.
It isn't linked to strategy	Data points float without ties to values, skills, or initiatives, so they're hard to act on.

What **good** people data looks like

It's first-party and intentional	Created by humans, on purpose, about real work.
It's close to the moment	Captured while the work is happening so recency and relevance stay high.
It's rich in context	Natural language that names the task, the behavior, the collaborators, and the impact.
It's broad and representative	Participation across levels, locations, shifts, and demographics.
It's ethical and governed	Transparent purpose, intentionality, and controls that travel with the data.
It's linkable	Offering specific insights on values, skills, teams, and strategic topics so AI can connect dots and route actions.
It's verifiable	Humans can trace a recommendation back to the underlying moment if needed.

Recognition data is the perfect people data

HR collects a lot of data, from HRIS transactions, surveys, and performance ratings to LMS completions, ticket volumes, and even email metadata. It all has its place, but mining data can be problematic. Only one kind of data is **intended** to be used as a source of truth on peer work and performance, in a way that rises to the list above. That is the data generated by strategic recognition.

Done right, and grounded in behavioral science, strategic recognition is a data source that is uniquely positioned to be the signal at the center of a people operating system.

In fact, strategic recognition is really the **only** data that can reasonably sit at the center of workforce management – sourced from people on the ground, who created it with intention.

Because it is sourced directly from employees in the moment, with observations they want to share about their coworkers and work, it is a rich, descriptive, authentic message your AI (and you) can trust.

Recognition is done right when it is:



Peer-to-peer

Required to harness the collective knowledge of the organization



Frequent

Required to generate a statistically relevant volume of data to mine



Monetary

Required to understand the magnitude of impact



Authentic

Required to deliver maximum emotional impact



Descriptive

Required for natural language processing to expose deep insight



Personalized

Required to produce rich individualized understanding



Equitable

Required to deliver an unbiased, fair, and inclusive experience



Calibrated

Required to ensure that rewards are accurately matched to effort and impact

Every recognition moment is filled with data

A well-written recognition captures data on multiple dimensions at once, far more than any other score or checkbox. Depending what your organization is looking for, it can give important cues around:

- **Strengths & skills in use** (capabilities demonstrated; emerging talent)
- **Performance evidence** (outputs and quality indicators)
- **Leadership signals** (coaching, initiative, influence)
- **Values alignment** (which behaviors show up and where)
- **Goal/initiative alignment** (tags to priorities, strategic initiatives, projects)
- **Collaboration patterns** (cross-team links, connectors, silos)
- **Relationship health** (who recognizes whom; inclusivity/equity)
- **Engagement & affinity** (participation, momentum, sentiment cues)
- **Retention/turnover intent signals** (drop-offs, isolation, imbalance)
- **Context you can audit** (who, what, when, why that is traceable to the moment)

The power of information density

Non-specific award message

Thanks for all your hard work in the meeting today, Jill.

vs.

Highly personalized, data-rich recognition message

Jill, thank you for your **strategic** insights during the **Q2 planning session**. By bringing a **team-first** attitude, you identified potential roadblocks facing **product development** and **set the tone** for a **candid, productive** afternoon. This resulted in a great meeting that led to some important **breakthrough decisions**. We're lucky we **found a woman** so invested in the success of others as you are. You are **key to our financial planning work**; here's to crushing it in Q2!



Wow! You've crafted a recognition moment that will leave a lasting impact!



Inclusion advisor

Rich recognition reveals:

People & relationships

Work & projects

Impact & performance

Talent & skills

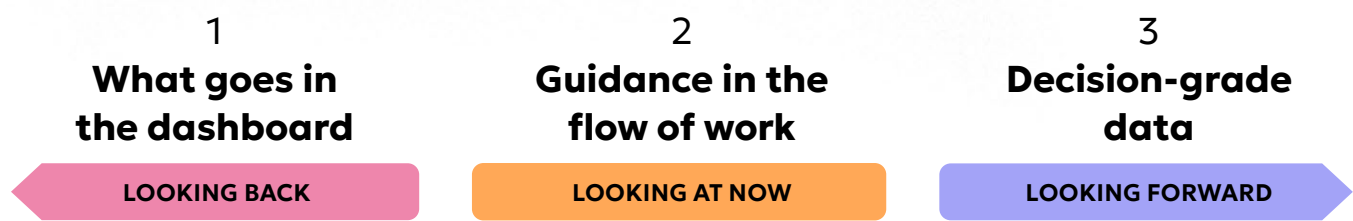
Company values & culture

Bias & micro-aggressions

Three tiers of workforce signals

You've got the right data: strategic recognition in the flow of work. The next move is delivery, or getting the right signal to the right person at the right moment with the smallest possible cognitive load.

There are three levels of insights that can take the place of a traditional dashboard, and make signals both accessible as a point in time and also in the flow of work.



Looking back: What goes in the dashboard

Dashboards don't disappear entirely in the new model. You'll still need history. Headcount, turnover, comp bands, internal mobility, survey scores, plus (on the recognition side) basic program health like recognition reach, frequency, and fairness. This is also where you can spot misalignment, bias, hidden gems, emerging skills, and culture gaps over time.

Use these reports to understand your culture and workforce, spot obvious gaps, and brief stakeholders without guesswork. What changed? Where did we invest? Did our efforts land evenly across different parts of the workforce? But be sure to keep these signals where they belong. They're essential for accountability, but not for steering Tuesday's standup.



Looking at now: Guidance in the flow of work

This is the tier of signals that replaces the ritual of “checking the dashboard.” Instead of hunting for meaning tile by tile, you want small, timely prompts that line up with human attention.

That means surfacing real-time nudges for people managers in places they’re already visiting, such as “Alex hasn’t been recognized in 90 days,” “Here are the people

driving our big rally cry forward,” or “Here are the skills your team is being recognized for.”

Managers can ask questions in real time about what is happening: “Who are my top performers?” “What work is happening on our key strategic initiatives?” “Who is best supporting our mission?” Together, these represent an ongoing conversation with the workforce, not a snapshot in time.



Looking forward: Decision-grade data

Prediction isn’t magic; it’s pattern plus proximity. When your dataset is right, you will see what’s likely to happen – and where to intervene before it does. Insights from recognition, for example, can show values in action, collaboration networks, and cultural influencers.

This tier is where the C-suite can stop asking for “more data” and

start getting clear answers to their real questions. “Who are tomorrow’s leaders?” “Who’s at risk of leaving?” “Which communities are the backbone of customer outcomes?”

Human-sourced signals allow AI to give advice based on on-the-ground insight and an algorithm built on billions of data points and millions of employees.

Replace the dashboard monolith with this simple rubric, and you’ll see your organization start to behave differently. Managers will spend less time interpreting and more time coaching. Employees can see themselves in the data – literally, in the words of their peers – and adjust faster. Executives will stop treating people data as history and start treating it as a steering wheel.

Rearchitecting people data for business leadership

Once you've replaced your dashboard sprawl with a simple rubric of signals – back, now, forward – the final move is orchestration: putting those tiers in conversation so leaders can steer, not stare.

This strategy will show up fast in day-to-day decisions to:

Prevent avoidable attrition.

Spot recognition drop-offs, isolation after reorgs, or equity gaps at the team level. Trigger manager nudges and a reconnect plan before the employees ghost you.

Redeploy hidden skill.

Surface contributors demonstrating in-demand capabilities or driving your top initiatives and move them to more high-impact work without waiting for the next cycle.

Tighten inclusion where it counts.

Track recognition equity and language inclusivity by location and role; target coaching and visibility so contribution gets seen and repeated.

Prove ROI in terms the business trusts.

Correlate the momentum and recognition velocity of your top initiatives (e.g., patient satisfaction, NPS, safety incidents, time-to-resolution) to show progress to stakeholders and defend budget and focus.

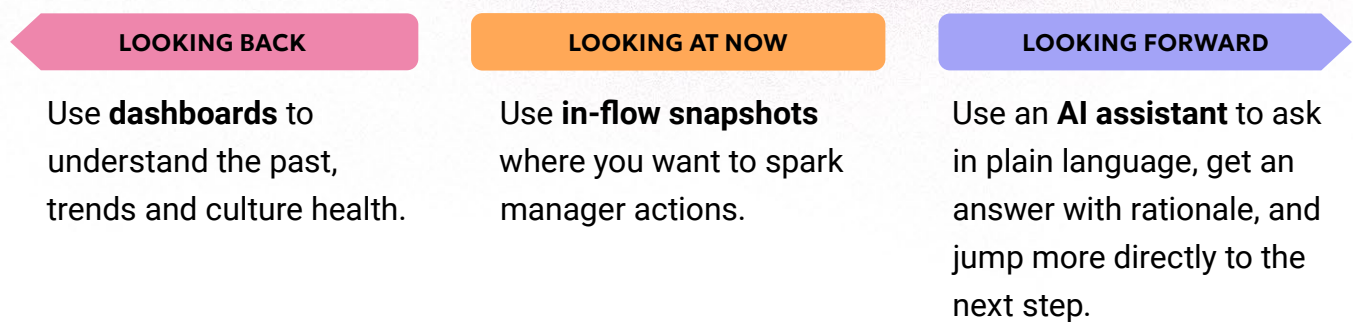
Spot and grow tomorrow's leaders.

Identify cultural energizers and values-aligned impact; pair with stretch assignments and mentors, then watch the network effects.

What metrics matter now

We can't treat all metrics the same. So which of these signals should sit in dashboards, which are real-time, and which are forward-looking?

The rule of thumb here is:



You might also consider a lightweight monthly brief to keep execs and boards aligned without burying them in slides – this will also help train them to ask new questions, instead of looking for the same charts.

You can use this grid to separate context (looking back), guidance (looking at now), and foresight (looking forward), and see where recognition can uniquely powers your view of the workforce, and provide the levers for change.

The signals rubric

Signal	Focus			What it tells you	Can be used for
Headcount & FTE				Size and structure	Capacity planning; hiring freeze or open reqs
Voluntary vs. involuntary turnover				Exit patterns	Root-cause review; policy / process fix
Retention by tenure (30/60/90)				Early churn risk	Onboarding redesign; manager coaching

Signal	Focus			What it tells you	Can be used for
Internal mobility & promotion rates				Career velocity and equity	Opportunity mapping; fairness audit
Absenteeism, time-to-fill				Operation health	Scheduling, recruiting changes
eNPS / engagement scores				Survey sentiment	Follow-up pulses; action planning
Recognition language quality & inclusivity				Specificity, tone, inclusive phrasing	Improve message quality; track progress
Recognition reach & frequency				Program health and coverage	Target low-coverage teams; celebrate bright spots
Manager engagement in recognition				Coaching and visibility habits	Nudge leaders; add recognition to 1:1s
Psychological safety / inclusion indices				Inclusion in practice	Close equity gaps; recognition language coaching
Skills in action (from recognition language)				Capabilities demonstrated, emerging strengths	Assign stretch work; create skill pools
Cross-team collaboration (Such as Work Circles®)				Connectors, silos, community strength	Remove blockers; amplify connectors
Attrition risk signals				Early flags: drop-offs, isolation, inequities	Reconnect plan; manager / HR outreach
Alignment to strategic initiatives (Such as Topics)				Momentum and drift on priorities	Rebalance resources; highlight wins
Cultural influencers / linchpins				Who moves culture and work	Visibility, mentorship, succession slate
Skills mapping & career readiness				Who's ready, and for what	Talent moves; learning investments
ROI correlations (recognition ↔ outcomes)				Impact on NPS, safety, patient sat, retention	Budget defense; scale what works

Signals starter packs

	Executives & board	People managers	HR & workforce planning
Critical signals:	• Strategic initiative momentum • Culture connectors • ROI • Inclusion heatmap • Early attrition risk	• Recognition gaps • Team skills in action • Cross-team allies and influencers • Inclusion prompts • 1:1 conversations	• Skills map • Readiness indicators • Hidden gems and culture energizers • Community strength • Risk clusters
Frequency:	• Monthly brief • Live AI assistance	• In-app reporting • Nudges	• Monthly brief • Live AI assistance

Tie these together and you've got a people OS: context when you need it, guidance where you need it, and foresight before you need it.

Embedding signals in the flow of work: the Workhuman way

Workhuman has spent decades turning human moments into decision-grade signals. Our strategic recognition programs generate first-party, voluntary data, written by people about real work, in the moment, with purpose and governance.

That combination of breadth, depth, and intent makes our dataset unusually reliable for leaders who need to move beyond dashboards and toward decisions.

Signals you can trust

Not all recognition data sources are equal. Workhuman's science-based approach to strategic recognition ensures your people

data includes the information that matters: what happened, which strengths were in play, who collaborated, and how it relates to company goals and values. Moreover, because it is generated by people (not AI) it ensures the insights are real, and not created by an endless AI loop.

If AI is the engine, Workhuman people data is the highest quality fuel you can give it.

Introducing Human Intelligence[®]

Human Intelligence is Workhuman's AI + data layer. It reads the rich language inside recognition, contextualizes it against 20 years of data collection, connects it to values, skills, teams, and initiatives, and then delivers those insights up exactly where they are needed. That means structured reports when you need history, lightweight guidance in the flow of work, and on-demand answers that help guide decisions.

Five ways Human Intelligence offers impactful human signals

1

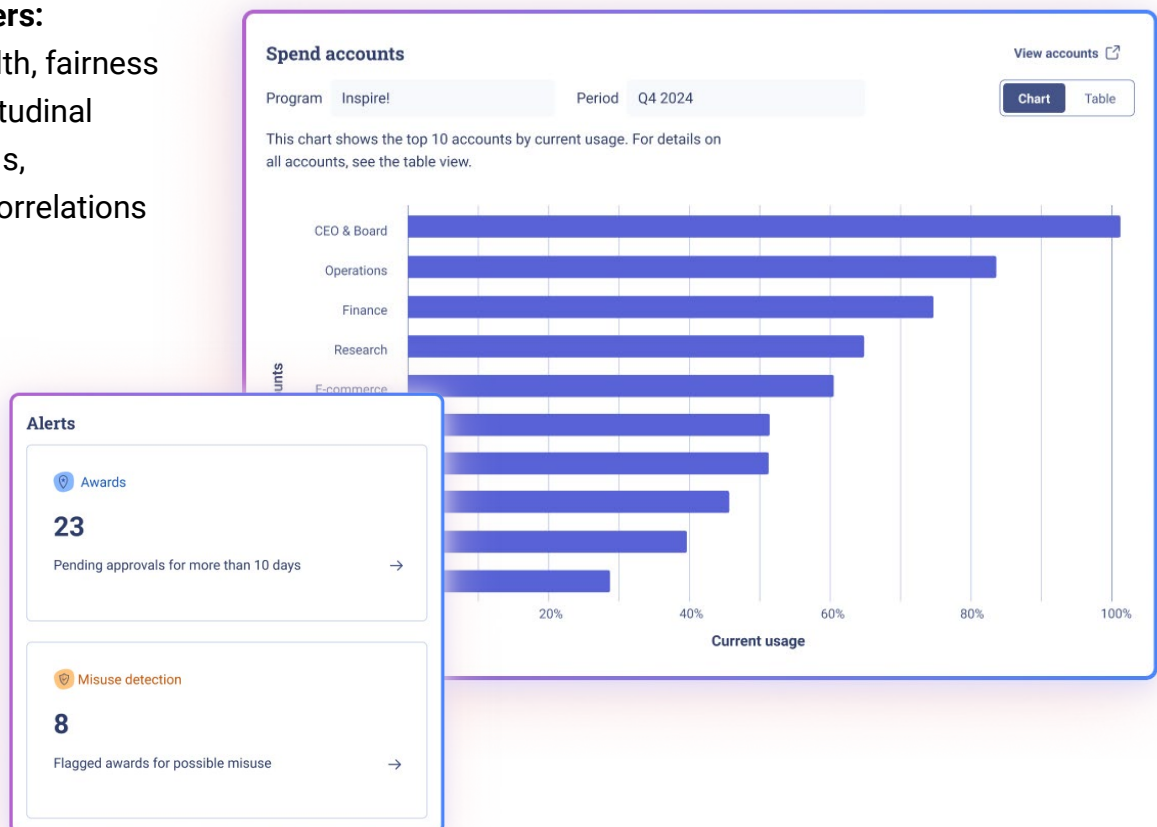
Recognition analytics & reporting

A clearer historical view

When you need the record, Human Intelligence provides structured views of adoption, equity, momentum, and ROI drivers – without flattening the story. Use these baselines to brief stakeholders, verify progress, and keep accountability visible.

What it delivers:

Program health, fairness checks, longitudinal culture signals, defensible correlations



2

iQ Snapshots

Guidance in the moment

Snapshots give managers timely cues in the flow of work: recognition gaps, participation dips, emerging strengths on priority work, connectors who deserve visibility. Small prompts, clear next steps, no hunting.

What it delivers:

Coaching in 1:1s,
addressing risk early,
celebrating bright spots
while they're bright



3

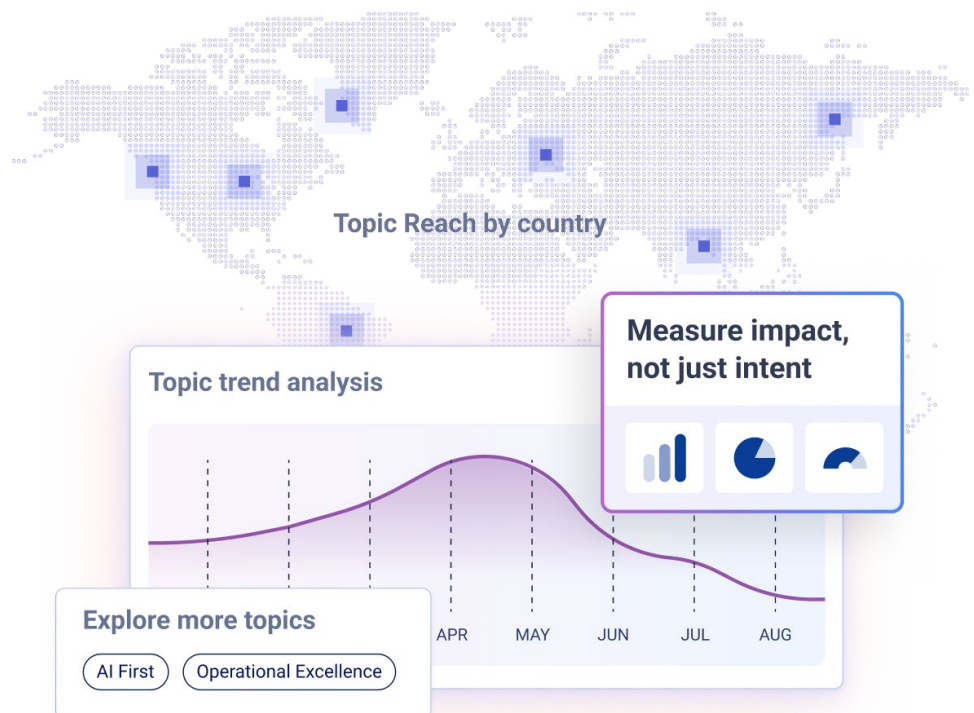
Topics

See strategy in the wild

Topics link moments to what matters – values, goals, and initiatives – so you can watch momentum and drift by market, product, or pillar. Each individual recognition adds to the overall live picture of execution.

What it delivers:

Resource focus,
showcasing wins,
adjusting course before
cycles close



4

AI Assistant

Real-time answers for leaders

Ask the questions leaders actually ask – readiness, inclusion, influence networks, progress on priorities – and get traceable answers linked back to the underlying signals. Plus, we offer an advanced option for even deeper executive insights.

What it delivers: Fast, defensible decisions without waiting on a dashboard

Unconscious bias in Recognition appears to be trending up in Manufacturing

What's the most demonstrated skill across the department?

✦ Ask

5

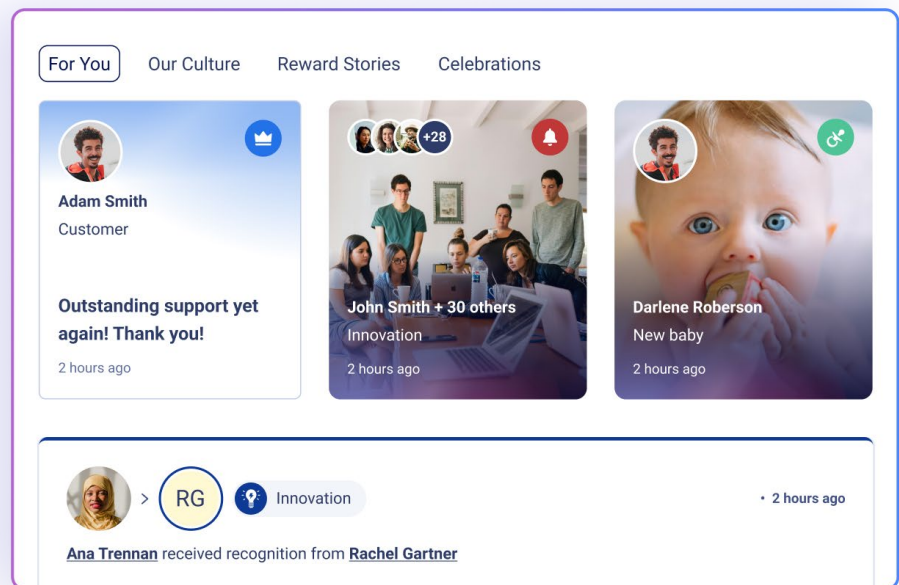
Culture Hub

Stories that inspire behavior

Culture Hub turns recognition into a personalized feed of “what good looks like,” surfacing data in small bites for impact. Short, visual stories make values visible on web and mobile, inviting participation and teaching norms in real time.

What it delivers:

Reinforcing desired behaviors, widening participation, making culture tangible



With Workhuman, the center of your data story shifts to signals in the flow of work. Dashboards don't disappear, but you can **deliver more useful guidance in the moment**, catching issues before they become risks.

From dashboards to decisions

The old HR dashboard can't keep pace with the speed of business. Instead we need human signals to steer the present and give you a head start on what's next.

When you center strategic recognition – using first-party, in-the-moment, values-tagged stories about real work – you get better signal integrity. Layer in Human Intelligence, and you've turned your mountain of dashboards into a true people operating system.

See it in action

If you're ready to move beyond dashboard archaeology, let us show you how Workhuman turns recognition into decision-grade signals.

Bring us your recognition.
We'll turn it into signals.

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Or read more on our blog: workhuman.com/blog

Join HR's leading innovators and trailblazers at our next [Workhuman Live](#) conference.

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