

2026 EDITION • STRATEGIC BUYER'S GUIDE

# The Dayforce Buyer's Guide

A research-enhanced framework for deciding whether Dayforce fits your workforce complexity, payroll and time discipline, and readiness to transform how people are paid, scheduled, and managed on a single platform.

PREPARED BY

**Align HCM**

EDITION

**2026**

BUILT FOR

**CHRO • CFO • HRIS • PAYROLL**

**THE CORE  
IDEA**

Dayforce is not one decision. It is four working together: **platform & module fit, workforce complexity, payroll & time discipline, and long-term ownership.** This guide turns each one into a working evaluation you can defend to the board.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Fourteen chapters, from the fit framework to a buyer workbook you can fill in.

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## ◆ HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

Dayforce is an established, capable platform. The question is not whether it works. It is whether your organization has the **workforce complexity to justify it, the payroll and time discipline to configure it, the manager readiness to sustain it, and the ownership clarity to keep it healthy after go-live.** Those four factors predict Dayforce outcomes more reliably than any feature comparison.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Executive Summary

01

**The organizations running the most complex workforces in the world share one challenge: how they pay, schedule, and manage people drives business performance, and their current systems were never built for it. Dayforce was built for exactly that reality.**

Dayforce is a single application built on one database, where time, pay, benefits, talent, and workforce management share the same record and payroll calculates continuously rather than in an end-of-period batch. The buyers who get the most out of Dayforce treat it as an **operating-model decision**, defining how work actually happens before they configure the system, and naming who owns scheduling, payroll, manager support, and the platform long after the implementation partner leaves.

## INSTALLED BASE

6,800+

organizations run on Dayforce worldwide

## EMPLOYEES LIVE

7.6M

people paid &amp; managed on the platform

## ARCHITECTURE

ONE

single app, single database, continuous pay

## The smartest questions to ask before you sign

- How does this align with our broader AI and payroll strategy?
- What business outcomes drive the project, and what is the case?
- Which modules fit our complexity, geography, and budget?
- Are HR, Payroll, Ops, Finance & IT aligned on who owns what?
- Are pay, union, premium, accrual & scheduling rules documented?
- Will managers own their workflows and the payroll impact?
- Do we have clean data and realistic payroll test scenarios?
- Who will own Dayforce after the implementation team leaves?

### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

The organizations that get fast results use Dayforce as a **strategic lever to operationalize productivity and cost savings**, treating the rollout as an operating change, not a technology swap. That discipline is what turns the investment into measurable gains in productivity, cost, and compliance.

## CHAPTER ONE • PROOF

# What Buyers See When They Get It Right

01

Dayforce pays back the organizations that invest in it seriously. Forrester's Total Economic Impact study of the Dayforce HCM Platform modeled a composite organization of 7,500 employees across multiple locations and found the following.



## Outcomes reported by Dayforce customers

- **Frontline managers:** 60% of scheduling time returned
- **Payroll leaders:** fewer surprises and corrections each cycle
- **Employees:** on-demand pay access through Dayforce Wallet
- **Operations:** teams adapt faster as the business changes

### FORRESTER TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT • DAYFORCE HCM PLATFORM

**Fewer payroll surprises, more empowered employees through self-service and on-demand pay, and teams that can adapt faster as the business evolves. A single record underneath it all makes every people decision faster and more defensible.**

FORRESTER TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Dayforce Decision Buyers Are Really Making

02

For many buyers, Dayforce is the answer to a workforce operating reality their current systems were never built to handle.

- |                                                                                         |                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Payroll requires manual validation after every cycle           | <input type="checkbox"/> Managers approve time late or inconsistently                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedules are built outside the system, off the books          | <input type="checkbox"/> HR and Operations need a clear owner for workforce data      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accruals, premiums & exceptions get manual review every period | <input type="checkbox"/> Reports are exported, reworked, and debated before decisions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance risk lives in spreadsheets and tribal knowledge     | <input type="checkbox"/> HR, payroll & WFM run on separate, disconnected systems      |

## The decision usually has five layers

- 1 Platform & module fit**  
Dayforce is one application, licensed by module. HR, payroll, benefits, time, scheduling, talent, and analytics share a single record, so scope is about which modules you turn on, not which product you buy.
- 2 Workforce complexity**  
Dayforce makes the most sense when scheduling, time, labor rules, locations, global pay, and manager execution create real pressure.
- 3 Payroll and time discipline**  
Undefined policies and manual exceptions don't disappear during implementation. With continuous calculation, they become configuration decisions that drive real-time pay.
- 4 Data and integration governance**  
Dayforce needs clean employee, job, pay, schedule, and benefits data, plus integration ownership across finance, identity, and reporting.
- 5 Long-term ownership**  
New releases, AI, and process improvements create ongoing work. Buyers need a post-go-live model that keeps Dayforce healthy.

## CHAPTER THREE

# The Pain Points Dayforce Should Solve

## 03

Dayforce pain is not the same as ADP pain or Workday pain. Each platform attracts a different kind of buyer because each one solves a different kind of problem. Dayforce earns its place when workforce execution, pay, time, and scheduling, becomes a daily source of risk and friction.

**ADP buyers**

## USUALLY FEEL

Payroll, compliance, service, product-fit, and implementation risk.

**Workday buyers**

## USUALLY FEEL

Enterprise transformation pain, where HR and finance have outgrown disconnected processes.

**Dayforce buyers**

## USUALLY FEEL

Time, scheduling, payroll calculation, manager ownership, and real-time workforce complexity.

1

**Payroll cannot be trusted without manual validation**

Every cycle means re-checking calculations, fixing exceptions, and reconciling accruals before anyone believes the result, so payroll runs as an emergency function instead of a rhythm.

**Buyer question:** which payroll scenarios, tested before go-live, will build the most lasting confidence in the system?

2

**Time & attendance leaks compliance risk every period**

Missed punches, transfers, differentials, meal rules, overtime, and union terms get handled by memory and manual review, and every gap turns into wage-and-hour exposure.

**Buyer question:** which timekeeping exceptions repeat every period, and could be handled automatically inside the system?

3

**Scheduling lives outside the system where no one trusts it**

Coverage, skills, labor budgets, fatigue, and compliance get managed in spreadsheets and side tools, so managers work around the system and the business never sees the real picture.

**Buyer question:** which scheduling rules are business-critical, and which are habits that should be redesigned?

## CHAPTER THREE • CONTINUED

# Pain Points, Continued

# 03

4

**HR, Payroll, and Operations work from conflicting data**

When separate systems own employee, pay, schedule, and benefits data, leadership loses confidence in headcount, labor cost, and accruals, and decisions wait on whoever last exported a spreadsheet.

**Buyer question:** who owns each workforce data domain after go-live?

5

**Managers are not equipped to own the daily workflow**

Approvals run late, exceptions pile up, and the people closest to the workforce lack the tools to act, so the whole operation slows down and adoption stalls.

**Buyer question:** which manager behaviors, when supported, will accelerate the most value from Dayforce?

6

**The platform stalls after go-live without an ownership model**

Without stabilization, ticket review, enhancement intake, release testing, and reporting governance, the system drifts, capabilities go unused, and the investment quietly underperforms.

**Buyer question:** who will own and grow Dayforce after the project team transitions out, and what resources will they need?

**If those pain points resonate, with payroll you have to validate, scheduling no one trusts, compliance risk in every period, and data nobody agrees on, then Dayforce is worth serious evaluation.**

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## 04

## CHAPTER FOUR

## When Dayforce Is the Right Fit



Dayforce is strongest when workforce operations are central to the business and leaders need HR, payroll, time, scheduling, and WFM to work together cleanly on one platform.

### Strong-fit signals

- ☐ Hourly, shift-based, frontline, or multi-location workforces
- ☐ WFM optimization affects profitability, coverage, or compliance
- ☐ Healthcare, manufacturing, retail, hospitality, public sector, logistics
- ☐ Payroll depends on complex time, premium, accrual & compliance rules
- ☐ Managers need better scheduling, approval & exception tools
- ☐ HR and Payroll need a cleaner operating model, not just a record
- ☐ Consolidating fragmented HR, payroll & WFM point systems into one
- ☐ Executive sponsorship, internal capacity & budget are in place

### Common Dayforce fit profiles

#### The WFM buyer

Complex schedules, time rules, locations, and compliance the current process can't handle cleanly.

#### The payroll-confidence buyer

Payroll must be more accurate, more governed, and less dependent on manual heroics.

#### The frontline-ops buyer

The business depends on better scheduling, time, and labor decisions at the location level.

#### The consolidation buyer

Wants HR, payroll, time, and WFM on one platform and one record instead of stitched-together tools.

#### The optimization buyer

Live on Dayforce but facing recurring tickets, reporting gaps, configuration drift, or unused modules.

#### The long-term buyer

Wants a durable, global people platform, not a short-term payroll fix.

#### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Dayforce is a strong fit when **workforce execution is a business issue, not only an HR issue**. The platform has the most value when the organization is ready to govern payroll, time, scheduling, data, and ownership.



## 05

## CHAPTER FIVE

# When Dayforce May Not Be the Right Fit



Dayforce is purpose-built for specific kinds of workforce complexity. The best buyers are honest about whether that complexity matches their reality.

## Dayforce may be too much platform when...

- |                                                                                           |                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The workforce is mostly salaried with simple, stable pay rules   | <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduling and time complexity aren't significant drivers           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The priority is basic HR administration, not payroll & WFM depth | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership wants a niche best-of-breed tool, not a unified platform |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The org isn't ready to define ownership or fund data cleanup     | <input type="checkbox"/> Managers aren't expected to own their workflows consistently        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The goal is a fast tool swap, not an operating change            | <input type="checkbox"/> No testing and training plan exists before implementation           |

## Patterns worth addressing before you buy

- 1 The feature-shopping buyer**  
 Strong product research done. Now ready to move from comparing features to defining the operational problems the platform must solve.
- 2 The underfunded-implementation buyer**  
 Strong licensing budget, but the full implementation investment (data, testing, training, integrations, change management) still needs building out.
- 3 The unclear-owner buyer**  
 HR, Payroll, Ops, Finance & IT must work through ownership; naming owners before configuration makes everything downstream faster.
- 4 The manager-resistant buyer**  
 Managers will own approvals, scheduling & exceptions. Set them up with training, accountability, and support for far better adoption.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Implementation Readiness

## 06

The strongest Dayforce implementations don't begin with configuration. They begin with clear pain, named owners, clean data, realistic testing, and a post-go-live plan.

Dayforce implementations typically run as a six-to-eighteen-month effort depending on complexity, module selection, data migration, integrations, and change management. A payroll-only rollout and a full HR, payroll, and WFM deployment do not create the same project shape.

**1 Define the business problem**

Start with specific, named problems, not broad goals. The clearer the pain, the faster the configuration, testing, and adoption.

**2 Name decision owners**

Payroll owns payroll. Ops owns scheduling. HR owns lifecycle and policy. Finance owns labor cost. IT owns security and integrations. Managers are represented.

**3 Build the data-cleanup lane early**

Review employee, job, location, pay-group, accrual, schedule, benefits, security, and historical data before build creates dependency on bad assumptions.

**4 Treat testing as a payroll rehearsal**

Test real pay scenarios, schedule changes, missed punches, transfers, retro, leave, overtime, premiums, integrations, reporting, and self-service.

**5 Fund change management beyond comms**

Dayforce changes daily behavior. Managers must approve, review, and publish; employees must trust self-service; admins must know when to fix or escalate.

**6 Plan the first 90 days after go-live**

Defect management, payroll stabilization, manager support, reporting cleanup, integration monitoring, and transition to SmartCare or long-term support.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## 07

# Data, Integrations & Workforce Governance

Dayforce value depends on trust: in time, pay, schedules, reports, and approvals. That trust is built through governance, defined before configuration begins.

## Data & Reporting Governance

- Official owners for employees, jobs, locations & pay groups
- Timekeeping, overtime, premium & differential rules
- Accruals, leave balances, schedules & coverage rules
- Cost centers, security roles & manager approvals
- Report definitions, source logic & historical data

## Payroll & Workforce Governance

- Which pay scenarios are business-critical?
- Which require parallel testing & sign-off?
- Who owns retro, off-cycle & corrections?
- Who owns scheduling rules & transfer logic?
- What's a hard compliance rule vs. a preference?

## A strong integration plan defines

- Source of truth for each data element
- Frequency of data movement
- API or file-based approach
- Error-handling process
- Business owner and technical owner
- Testing scenarios & go-live criteria

### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Dayforce creates trust when the organization **governs the data, payroll rules, schedules, integrations, and reports** that drive daily decisions. That governance is what makes Dayforce a platform people rely on rather than one they work around.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# AI, Co-Pilot & Adoption Readiness

08

Dayforce builds AI into the platform through **Dayforce Co-Pilot** and its agentic AI **Workspace**, working from the same single record that runs pay and time. The value depends on whether users trust the guidance enough to act on it. AI readiness is mostly adoption readiness.

## Evaluate AI through practical questions

- ☐ Which manual HR, payroll, or manager tasks benefit most?
- ☐ Which workforce decisions would benefit from timely guidance?
- ☐ Which managers need help with staffing, fatigue & coverage?
- ☐ Which employee questions could become better self-service?
- ☐ Which reporting or analytics workflows could get easier?
- ☐ What data-quality issues would limit AI usefulness?

## The four pillars of adoption readiness

### Awareness

Users need to know what exists. Features introduced clearly in training are the ones that get used.

### Trust

Confidence that guidance is grounded in the right data, policies, and context, built through narrow use cases first.

### Governance

Clear rules for what AI can recommend, what humans must review, and how exceptions are handled.

### Measurement

Measured by outcomes: reduced tickets, faster decisions, fewer exceptions, cleaner self-service.

### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Dayforce AI delivers the most value when it is **tied to real operational goals** and backed by a plan to train users, build trust, and measure adoption. Organizations that approach it that way see results that justify the investment.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Total Cost of Ownership

09

Dayforce total cost is bigger than licensing. Buyers should evaluate the cost of implementation, support, ownership, adoption, and missed optimization.



## Software & modules

Driven by module selection, employee count, geographies, and complexity.



## Implementation services

Shaped by payroll complexity, time rules, conversion, integrations & testing.



## Internal time

The team still runs the business: requirements, decisions, testing, training.



## Data & integration cleanup

Clean data and clear integrations reduce implementation cost and risk.



## Change management & training

Adoption depends on role-based, practical training that changes behavior.



## Post-go-live support

Stabilization, ticket review, release testing, and enhancement planning.

## COST CATEGORY SEVEN • HIDDEN &amp; UNUSED CAPABILITY

**The greatest opportunity in Dayforce ownership is activating every capability you have licensed. When pay, time, scheduling, analytics, and self-service are fully in use on one record, the platform's return grows with every pay cycle.**

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## CHAPTER TEN

# Questions Buyers Should Ask

# 10

Good questions protect the buyer from purchasing a platform without buying the operating model needed to run it.

## Ask the vendor

- 1 Which Dayforce modules fit our size, complexity, and goals?
- 2 How does continuous calculation payroll change our close process?
- 3 Which capabilities are included in scope, and which need add-ons?
- 4 What standard support is included, and what requires premium?
- 5 How are releases tested, communicated, and adopted?
- 6 Which references match our size, industry, and complexity?
- 7 What is the roadmap for WFM, global pay, analytics, and Co-Pilot?

## Ask the implementation partner

- 1 How many Dayforce implementations like ours have you delivered?
- 2 Who is on the delivery team, and what Dayforce experience do they have?
- 3 How do you handle decisions when HR, Payroll, Ops & IT disagree?
- 4 What is your data-conversion method?
- 5 How do you test payroll with business owners, not just admins?
- 6 How do you train managers for real operational workflows?
- 7 How do you help clients avoid underusing the platform after launch?

## CHAPTER TEN • CONTINUED

# Ask Internally

The most important questions are the ones you ask your own team. They define the operating model Dayforce will run on.

## Outcomes & process

- 1 What workforce outcomes are we trying to achieve?
- 2 Which processes are worth keeping?
- 3 Which current processes are only workarounds?
- 4 How will we measure adoption?

## Ownership

- 1 Who owns payroll outcomes?
- 2 Who owns scheduling rules?
- 3 Who owns timekeeping exceptions?
- 4 Who owns reporting definitions?
- 5 Who owns integrations after go-live?
- 6 Who will own and grow Dayforce long-term?

Which references can speak directly to implementation experience, post-go-live support, and workforce-management ROI, and whether they would make the same decision again?

THE REFERENCE QUESTION THAT MATTERS MOST

### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

If HR, Payroll, Operations, Finance, and IT can answer the ownership questions before configuration begins, **everything downstream moves faster**, and the platform is far more likely to be trusted after go-live.

## 11

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Dayforce Decision Scorecard



Score each area from 1 to 5. Total the sections, then read your result against the band below.

#### PLATFORM FIT

- Enough workforce complexity to justify Dayforce
- Payroll, time & scheduling are real improvement areas
- Managers need better workflows
- Consolidating systems reduces cost & risk
- Module scope is clear and mapped to need

#### IMPLEMENTATION READINESS

- Executive sponsor is named and active
- Internal project owner has authority
- HR, Payroll, Ops, Finance & IT aligned
- Pay, time & accrual rules can be documented
- Data audit can start before configuration

#### TESTING READINESS

- Payroll scenarios are defined
- Timekeeping exceptions are known
- Manager & self-service workflows in testing
- Reports & integrations have go/no-go criteria

#### POST-GO-LIVE MODEL

- SmartCare or managed support is planned
- Reporting & release governance is owned
- AI activation has use cases & measurement
- Manager reinforcement is planned

#### Below 50

Invest in readiness first

#### 50 to 64

Conditional fit: resolve gaps

#### 65 to 100

Strong fit: proceed with discipline



# 12

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# How Align HCM Helps



Align HCM works for the buyer, not the vendor. Our job is to give you an honest view of Dayforce fit, and to make the investment pay back.



### Assessment

Independent fit & readiness review across complexity, payroll, data, and ownership.



### Implementation

Planning, configuration decisions, testing, go-live readiness, and stabilization.



### Client-Side Services

We help your team decide, keep the project moving, and protect your interests.



### Data Conversion

Map, clean, validate, and load the data Dayforce needs to operate properly.



### System Integration

Plan and support integrations across payroll, benefits, identity & finance.



### Training & Align Academy

Role-based training for HR, Payroll, Ops, managers, and administrators.



### Optimization

Clean reports, refine workflows, activate unused capabilities, lift adoption.



### SmartCare

Post-go-live support: stabilization, optimization, and transformation work.



### Free Assessment

A clear, independent view of your Dayforce opportunity before you commit.

#### FREE ASSESSMENT

## Pressure-test your Dayforce decision before you commit.

You receive an independent fit recommendation, a full readiness scoring review across payroll, time, scheduling, data, integrations & governance, and a recommended next-90-day action plan. Get in touch at [alignhcm.com/contact](https://alignhcm.com/contact) and mention the Dayforce Buyer's Guide.

- Independent fit recommendation
- Full readiness scoring review
- Payroll, time, scheduling, data & integrations
- Recommended next-90-day action plan

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Source Notes

# 13

Figures are drawn from public vendor statements, an independent ROI study, peer-reviewed research, and Align HCM's own delivery experience.

## Align HCM: How Dayforce Built Its Platform Around AI

Source for Align's objective advisory stance on Dayforce architecture, continuous-calculation payroll, AI, fit profiles, and implementation realities.

[alignhcm.com/blog/most-hcm-platforms-add-ai-features.-dayforce-built-its-platform-around-ai](https://alignhcm.com/blog/most-hcm-platforms-add-ai-features.-dayforce-built-its-platform-around-ai)

## Dayforce HCM Suite & Payroll

Official product pages positioning the single-application platform across HR, payroll, benefits, WFM, time, scheduling, talent, analytics, and Dayforce Co-Pilot.

[dayforce.com/why-dayforce/dayforce-suite](https://dayforce.com/why-dayforce/dayforce-suite) · [dayforce.com/how-we-help/dayforce/pay-accurately-and-efficiently](https://dayforce.com/how-we-help/dayforce/pay-accurately-and-efficiently)

## Forrester Total Economic Impact: Dayforce HCM Platform

176% ROI over three years, \$6.8M net present value, payback under six months, and 60% of scheduling time returned to managers for a composite 7,500-employee organization.

COMMISSIONED STUDY OF THE DAYFORCE HCM PLATFORM

## Peer-reviewed academic research

Hong & Kim (organizational fit); Umble et al. (critical success factors); DeLone & McLean (IS success); Venkatesh et al. (technology acceptance, UTAUT).

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Analyst rankings and vendor figures support this guide's framing, yet they should not replace a buyer-fit analysis built on your own workforce complexity, payroll and time discipline, data quality, and readiness.

14

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Buyer Workbook



Print these worksheets or fill them in digitally. They turn the guide into your own decision record.

Worksheet One • Define the Pain

The clearer the pain, the faster the configuration and adoption.

The workforce outcome we are pursuing with Dayforce is...

-----

The current workaround is...

-----

The business value of replacing it with a better process is...

-----

The result we want twelve months after go-live is...

-----

Worksheet Two • Map Dayforce Fit

Capture the numbers that shape module scope and project size.

Total employees

-----

Locations

-----

Union / CBA rules

-----

Legal entities

-----

Critical integrations

-----

Hourly workforce size

-----

Pay groups

-----

States or provinces

-----

Shift types

-----

Likely module scope

-----

CHAPTER FOURTEEN • CONTINUED

# Workbook, Continued

# 14

### Worksheet Three • Payroll & Time Readiness

Score each area 1 to 5. Anything below 3 needs cleanup before build.

|                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pay groups & pay rules | Overtime & differentials |
| Premiums & accruals    | Leave rules              |
| Manager approvals      | Parallel test scenarios  |

### Worksheet Four • Reporting Governance

Define the owner, source logic, definition, and review cadence for each.

|                      |                           |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Headcount & turnover | Labor cost & overtime     |
| Schedule coverage    | Time & payroll exceptions |
| Accruals & leave     | Compliance indicators     |

### Worksheet Five • First 90 Days

Plan the most valuable phase of Dayforce ownership.

0 to 30 days: stabilize payroll, approvals, integrations, defects & support...

31 to 60 days: normalize reporting, self-service & recurring ticket patterns...

61 to 90 days: optimize config, activate capabilities, transition to SmartCare...

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