2026 EDITION · STRATEGIC BUYER'S GUIDE

# The Workday Buyer's Guide

A practical, research-enhanced guide for deciding whether Workday is the right HCM and finance platform, and whether your organization is ready to implement it without creating governance, reporting, data, adoption, or cost problems.

| PREPARED BY | EDITION | BUILT FOR |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Align HCM** | **2026** | **CHRO · CFO · HRIS** |

THE CORE IDEA

Workday is strongest when the buyer needs **one governed operating model** for people, finance, planning, reporting, and change. It gets weakest when the buyer treats it like a cleaner HR database.

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

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◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Workday is strongest when the buyer needs **one governed operating model** for people, finance, planning, reporting, and change. It gets weakest when the buyer treats it like a cleaner HR database.

CHAPTER ONE

# Executive Summary

**Workday should feel less like a software purchase and more like an operating model decision.**

Workday can be a powerful platform for organizations that need more than HR administration. The real value shows up when HR, Finance, IT, Payroll, Operations, and executives need one trusted model for workforce data, organizational structure, talent movement, planning, reporting, and business change. The demo usually looks clean. The hard part comes later, when the organization defines how jobs, positions, supervisory organizations, cost centers, security roles, payroll providers, reports, integrations, approvals, and business processes should work together.

SCALE

**11,500+**

customers globally, per Workday

REACH

**75M+**

users under contract across the customer community

SUITE

**7,000+**

core HCM and Financial Management customers

That scale matters, yet scale does not remove buyer responsibility. A platform this broad rewards organizations that make decisions clearly, clean data early, fund change management properly, and keep ownership active after go-live.

◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Workday is a strong fit when the business needs enterprise-level HR and finance alignment, mature governance, clean reporting, and long-term platform ownership. **The risk rises when the buyer wants transformation but lacks the internal structure to support it.**

01

## The best buyers ask six harder questions first

The best Workday buyers do not ask whether Workday can do something. If you can answer these with confidence, you are ready to evaluate Workday.

1. **Are we complex enough for Workday to create meaningful value?**
2. **Are we prepared to redesign the processes our current systems have been hiding?**
3. **Can HR and Finance agree on workforce definitions before build starts?**
4. **Do we have the internal owners to make fast, cross-functional decisions?**
5. **Can we support Workday after implementation without letting the platform drift?**
6. **Are we buying AI and analytics capability we can realistically activate?**

> **If the operating model is ready, Workday simplifies complexity. If it is not, Workday exposes every decision the business has avoided.**
>
> THE WORKDAY BUYER'S GUIDE · ALIGN HCM

CHAPTER TWO

# The Decision Buyers Are Really Making

For many buyers, Workday is not just competing against ADP, Dayforce, or UKG. It is competing against the current operating reality.

- HR has one headcount number and Finance has another.
- Reorganizations take weeks of spreadsheet work.
- Managers do not trust the reporting library.
- Employees still open tickets for tasks the system was supposed to simplify.
- IT owns integrations nobody in the business can explain.
- Payroll depends on regional providers, custom feeds, and manual validation.
- AI capabilities exist in the tenant while the business has no adoption plan.
- The organization still makes workforce decisions from stale exports.

## The Workday decision usually has four layers

### 1. Platform fit

Workday makes the most sense when the organization has enough complexity to justify a unified enterprise platform: matrix structures, multi-entity operations, workforce planning needs, frequent reorgs, global or regional payroll coordination, deep reporting requirements, and strong HR-Finance dependency.

### 2. Transformation readiness

Workday does not create clean ownership by itself. Leaders need to decide who owns job architecture, position management, security, integrations, reporting, change management, and release management before implementation exposes the gaps.

### 3. Data and reporting discipline

Workday can centralize data, yet it will not magically reconcile conflicting definitions. If HR, Finance, Operations, and IT disagree on headcount, cost center, worker type, position, job, location, and supervisory organization logic, the reporting pain moves into the new platform.

### 4. Long-term ownership

Workday keeps changing. New releases, AI capabilities, reporting tools, integration options, and workflow improvements create ongoing work. Buyers need a post-go-live model that keeps Workday healthy after the launch team leaves.

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CHAPTER THREE

# The Pain Points Workday Should Solve

Workday pain is not the same as Dayforce pain or ADP pain. Each platform attracts a different buyer because each one solves a different problem.

### ADP buyers

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

### Dayforce buyers

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

### Workday buyers

Enterprise transformation pain. The organization has outgrown disconnected HR and finance processes.

## Six pain points, six buyer questions

### 1 HR and Finance do not trust the same numbers

When HR and Finance define headcount differently, every workforce conversation slows down. Teams build reports reactively, create duplicate logic, and eventually stop trusting the reports they just paid for.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*Which workforce metrics need one enterprise definition before go-live?*

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### 2 The org model is more complex than the current system can handle

Matrix reporting, frequent reorgs, multiple entities, cost center changes, shared services, acquisitions, and hybrid work all pressure legacy HRIS setups.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*How often do org, job, cost center, or manager changes require manual cleanup today?*

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### 3 Data migration exposes years of shortcuts

Moving employee, job, position, compensation, payroll, benefits, organization, security, and historical data into a new model reveals inconsistent codes, inactive positions, stale assignments, and undocumented exceptions. Treat data work as a core project lane.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*What data do we need to clean before configuration begins?*

03

**7X**

CHANGE MANAGEMENT EFFECT

more likely to achieve change success with excellent change management, per Prosci

### 4 Integrations are owned technically, not operationally

Workday connects to payroll, benefits carriers, identity systems, recruiting, learning, ERP, data warehouses, and reporting environments. A technical feed can still fail the business when nobody owns the rule behind it.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*For each integration, who owns the business outcome after go-live?*

### 5 Change management is treated as communications

Workday changes how people request, approve, report, plan, and manage work. Training someone to click through a workflow is not enough. Managers must understand what their actions do downstream.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*Which groups need behavior change, not just system training?*

### 6 AI is bought faster than it is adopted

The opportunity is real, yet buyers still need to ask whether their tenant, data, roles, governance, and training are ready, and how adoption will be measured.

**BUYER QUESTION**

*Which manual workflows are painful enough to justify AI activation?*

◆ **BUYER TAKEAWAY**

The right question is not whether Workday is powerful. It is whether your company has enough complexity, leadership alignment, and operating discipline to turn that power into value.

CHAPTER FOUR

# When Workday Is the Right Fit

Workday is usually strongest when the organization has enterprise complexity and leadership wants HR and Finance to work from one operating model.

## Strong-fit signals

- 1,500+ employees, or structural complexity that behaves like a larger enterprise.
- Matrix management, frequent reorganizations, shared services, or multi-entity operations.
- HR and Finance need aligned headcount, workforce cost, and planning logic.
- Talent, skills, succession, or learning needs are strategically important.
- Leaders need better workforce analytics, not just cleaner employee records.
- The organization wants a long-term HCM and finance platform, not a short-term payroll fix.
- The buyer has sponsorship, capacity, and budget for implementation, change management, integrations, training, and post-go-live support.

## Common Workday fit profiles

### The HR & Finance transformation buyer

Wants shared planning, cleaner workforce cost visibility, and fewer reconciliation fights between HR and Finance.

### The complex enterprise buyer

Has matrix structures, frequent org changes, multiple entities, and reporting needs the current system cannot support cleanly.

### The talent strategy buyer

Needs talent, learning, succession, skills, internal mobility, and workforce planning to connect in one architecture.

### The post-acquisition buyer

Is consolidating systems after growth, acquisition, or restructuring and needs cleaner governance across job, position, organization, payroll, and finance data.

Nucleus Research describes large enterprises as pursuing comprehensive, integrated HR solutions that unify data, processes, and people with fewer vendors. They are not just shopping for HR transactions.

04

05

CHAPTER FIVE

# When Workday May Be Too Much Platform

A strong buyer's guide should be honest about the wrong fit. Workday may be more platform than the organization needs when:

- HR requirements are straightforward.
- The workforce is mostly salaried, stable, and operationally simple.
- The company does not need deep HR-Finance planning integration.
- Leadership wants a fast payroll replacement, not a business transformation.
- The team lacks internal project ownership across HR, Finance, IT, Payroll, and Operations.
- Data cleanup would be deferred until after contract signature.
- The budget covers licensing but not implementation, integrations, training, reporting strategy, change management, release management, or post-go-live support.
- The organization wants advanced AI and analytics but cannot define which manual workflows need improvement.

> **Workday underperforms when buyers overbuy the platform and underfund the operating model.**
>
> CHAPTER FIVE · WHEN WORKDAY IS TOO MUCH PLATFORM

### DO NOT BUY WORKDAY YET IF

- HR and Finance cannot agree on core workforce definitions.
- No one owns data quality.
- No one owns reporting governance.
- No one owns integrations after go-live.
- The project sponsor cannot resolve cross-functional decisions quickly.
- Managers are not part of adoption planning.
- The business case depends on AI capability without an activation plan.

CHAPTER SIX

# Implementation Readiness

Workday implementations succeed or struggle before configuration begins. Technology matters, yet leadership gaps, unclear process ownership, weak change management, and poor data quality are usually the real failure points.

GATE ONE

### Executive sponsorship

The sponsor needs authority across HR, Finance, IT, Payroll, and Operations. When sponsorship is vague, the project waits for decisions and scope drifts.

GATE TWO

### Internal project ownership

A partner can guide the work. The buyer still owns the business decisions, so someone inside needs authority, availability, and credibility to answer quickly.

GATE THREE

### Process redesign

Workday should not recreate every workaround from the old environment. Decide which processes stay, which change, and which are retired.

GATE FOUR

### Data audit

Audit employee data, job architecture, position data, cost centers, pay groups, benefits, security roles, locations, supervisory organizations, historical data, payroll provider data, and reporting dependencies.

GATE FIVE

### Integration inventory

Every inbound and outbound feed needs a named business owner, technical owner, testing owner, and post-go-live support owner.

GATE SIX

### Training and adoption plan

Training should be role-based. HR administrators, payroll teams, finance users, managers, employees, IT, and executives need different learning paths.

GATE SEVEN

### Hypercare and SmartCare planning

The first 90 days should not be improvised. Plan issue triage, defect management, reporting review, payroll and finance validation, adoption tracking, and a path into ongoing optimization.

◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Readiness is not paperwork. **It is the difference between a Workday launch an[illegible]ing mod[illegible]**

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CHAPTER SEVEN

# Data, Integrations & Reporting Governance

Most Workday pain after go-live comes from governance decisions missed before go-live. The core question is simple: who has authority over each data domain?

Without ownership, the platform fills with exceptions. Reports break, managers lose trust, HRIS becomes a ticket queue, and Finance returns to spreadsheets.

## Data governance: assign an owner to each domain

- Worker data
- Job and position data
- Supervisory organization
- Cost center and financial dimensions
- Compensation and pay group logic
- Benefits and eligibility
- Security roles
- Location and legal entity
- Reporting definitions
- Integration ownership

## Integration governance

Each integration represents a business dependency, not just a technical connection. Common areas include payroll providers, benefits carriers, identity and SSO, recruiting and onboarding, learning, time and attendance, finance or ERP, data warehouses and BI, background checks, and compliance tools.

**Each integration should have:** a business purpose, a source of truth, a field owner, an error-handling process, a testing plan, a support owner, and a change-control plan.

## Reporting governance

Reporting usually breaks because teams build reactively. A request comes in, someone copies a report, the logic changes slightly, and eventually the library becomes too messy to trust.

> **The fix is not more reports. The fix is a reporting philosophy.**
>
> CHAPTER SEVEN · REPORTING GOVERNANCE

## A Workday reporting strategy should define

- Which executive questions need standard dashboards.
- Which metrics need one approved definition.
- Which reports should be delivered, custom, discovery board, or analytics layer.
- Who owns report naming, documentation, access, and retirement.
- How headcount, turnover, vacancy, position, cost center, and worker population logic will be governed.
- How report changes will be handled after reorgs, releases, and process updates.

◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Workday should reduce reporting friction. **Without governance, it becomes a better-looking way to produce the same confusion.**

CHAPTER EIGHT

# AI, Illuminate & Adoption Readiness

Workday's AI story is becoming more important to the business case. The risk is buying the AI story without an adoption plan.

PLATFORM-WIDE SIGNAL

**1.7B**

AI actions across the platform in fiscal 2026, per Workday

ADOPTION

**75%+**

of core Workday customers use Workday AI

CHANGE EFFECT

**7X**

more likely to succeed with excellent change management, per Prosci

## AI VALUE DEPENDS ON REAL USE CASES

- Reducing repetitive HR questions.
- Improving employee self-service.
- Supporting recruiters with high-volume tasks.
- Helping managers act on workforce insights.
- Improving expense, finance, or planning workflows.
- Surfacing skills and talent opportunities.
- Reducing manual report interpretation.

## AI ALSO DEPENDS ON READINESS

- Clean data.
- Clear security roles.
- Documented business processes.
- Manager and employee trust.
- Human review where decisions carry risk.
- Governance around how AI is used in HR and finance workflows.
- Measurement beyond turning it on.

◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Workday AI can strengthen the business case, **but only when the buyer connects it to real workflows, clean data, governance, and adoption.**

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CHAPTER NINE

# Total Cost of Ownership

Workday cost should be evaluated over years, not months. A practical model spans four lanes, and most buyers price the first and underfund the other three.

2025 SURVEY

**70%**

of HR leaders expect HR software costs to rise, per Gartner Digital Markets

DISCIPLINED SPEND

**60%**

plan to boost HR technology investment, across 3,256 respondents in 11 countries

LANE 01

## License

- Subscription fees by module and employee population.
- Future module expansion.

LANE 02

## Implementation

- Implementation partner services.
- Internal project team time.
- Data conversion and cleanup.
- Integration design, build, testing, and maintenance.
- Security design and testing.

LANE 03

## People & Adoption

- Change management and communications.
- Role-based training.
- Payroll or third-party provider coordination.

LANE 04

## Run the Platform

- Hypercare after go-live.
- Reporting architecture and report cleanup.
- Release testing and adoption.
- Ongoing admin, optimization, and SmartCare support.
- AI activation and adoption work.

The mistake is treating implementation as the whole cost. Workday is a living platform, and releases, AI, reporting needs, reorganizations, and acquisitions all create ongoing work.

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CHAPTER TEN

# Questions Buyers Should Ask

The questions buyers ask determine the implementation they get. The cheapest proposal is rarely the lowest-risk decision.

## Cost questions to answer early

- What is included in year one, and what becomes a year-two add-on?
- Which integrations are custom?
- How much internal capacity is needed during implementation?
- Who supports Workday after go-live?
- What reporting, change management, and release management work is included?
- What does optimization look like after the first 90 days?

## Ask Workday

- Which modules are included in the proposal, and which capabilities require additional licensing?
- Which parts of our use case fit standard functionality, and which require configuration, partner work, or future phases?
- How does pricing scale with headcount, countries, entities, modules, and AI capabilities?
- Which payroll geographies are native, managed, partner-supported, or third-party?
- Which integrations are prebuilt, partner-built, or custom?
- What standard support is included, and what requires premium support?
- How should we plan for release testing and adoption?
- Which AI capabilities are available now in our proposed scope?
- What customer references match our size, industry, and complexity?

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### ASK THE IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER

- How many Workday implementations have you supported for organizations like ours?
- Who will be on the delivery team, and what Workday experience do they have?
- How do you handle client-side decision-making when HR, Finance, IT, and Operations disagree?
- How do you document job, position, organization, security, and reporting decisions?
- What is your data conversion method?
- How do you test integrations with business owners, not only technical owners?
- What usually breaks first after go-live?
- How do you transition from implementation to SmartCare, optimization, or long-term support?

### ASK INTERNALLY

- What pain are we trying to remove?
- Which current processes are worth keeping, and which are only workarounds?
- Who owns each core data domain?
- Which reports do executives actually need?
- How will we support managers after training?
- How will we measure adoption?
- What happens if HR and Finance disagree on a definition?
- Who owns Workday after the project team leaves?

### ◆ BUYER TAKEAWAY

Good questions protect the buyer from buying a platform without buying the operating model needed to run it. Underfunded implementation creates expensive cleanup.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Workday Decision Scorecard

☑

Score each area from 1 to 5. Sixteen items, a maximum of 80 points.

## PLATFORM FIT

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization has enough complexity to justify Workday. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| HR and Finance need shared workforce planning and reporting logic. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Talent, skills, succession, or learning needs are strategically important. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Current system fragmentation creates measurable risk or waste. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Workday Financial Management or planning integration is part of the strategic case. | 0 0 0 0 0 |

## IMPLEMENTATION READINESS

| | |
|---|---|
| Executive sponsor is named and active. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Internal project owner has decision authority. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| HR, Finance, IT, Payroll, and Operations are aligned on governance. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Process redesign is funded. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Data audit can start before configuration. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Integration inventory is complete. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Change management is budgeted beyond basic training. | 0 0 0 0 0 |

## POST-GO-LIVE MODEL

| | |
|---|---|
| SmartCare, optimization, or managed support is planned. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Reporting governance is owned. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Release management is owned. | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| AI activation has use cases and measurement. | 0 0 0 0 0 |

| Below 40 | 40 to 54 | 55 to 80 |
|---|---|---|
| Pause and re-evaluate | Conditional fit | Strong fit |

**55 to 80:** strong fit, proceed with disciplined planning. **40 to 54:** conditional fit, resolve governance, data, TCO, or adoption gaps first. **Below 40:** pause and revisit timing, scope, partner, or readiness.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

# How Align HCM Helps

Align HCM helps buyers make HCM platform decisions with the operating reality in view.

### Assessment

Pressure-test Workday fit against size, complexity, HR and Finance needs, readiness, reporting, data quality, integration scope, and ownership.

### Implementation

Implementation planning, project execution, configuration decisions, testing, go-live readiness, and stabilization.

### Client-side services

Help the internal team decide, keep the project moving, translate needs into requirements, and protect the buyer's interests.

### Data conversion

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

### System integration

Plan and support integrations across payroll, benefits, identity, recruiting, learning, finance, and reporting.

### Training & Academy

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

### Optimization

Clean up reports, refine processes, improve adoption, and activate unused capabilities after go-live.

### SmartCare

Support the system after launch through stabilization, ongoing support, optimization, and transformation.

FREE ASSESSMENT

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

Get in touch with Align HCM and mention the Workday Buyer's Guide when scheduling.

- Independent fit recommendation.
- Implementation readiness scoring.
- Data, integration, reporting, and governance risk review.
- Recommended next-90-day plan.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Source Notes

Figures here are drawn from public vendor statements, analyst research, and Align HCM's own delivery experience. Each source links to the original.


### Workday HCM overview ↗

Workday positions HCM as an integrated suite spanning core HCM, payroll, workforce planning, analytics, talent, workforce management, and employee experience.

### Workday customer facts ↗

More than 11,500 customers globally, more than 75 million users under contract, more than 90% of deployments completed on time in FY26, and over 75% of core customers using Workday AI.

### Workday fiscal 2026 results ↗

More than 7,000 core Workday Financial Management and HCM customers, and 1.7 billion AI actions across the platform in fiscal 2026.

### Gartner Digital Markets 2025 HR Software Trends ↗

70% of HR leaders expect HR software costs to rise and 60% plan to boost investment, based on 3,256 respondents across 11 countries.

### Nucleus Research Enterprise HCM Technology Value Matrix 2025 ↗

Describes enterprise HCM buyers as seeking comprehensive, integrated HR solutions that unify data, processes, and people with fewer vendors.

### Prosci change management success research ↗

Projects with excellent change management are up to 7X more likely to achieve change success.


Peer-reviewed ERP and information-systems research informs the readiness, adoption, data-quality, and governance claims: Hong and Kim (Information & Management); Umble, Haft, and Umble (European Journal of Operational Research); DeLone and McLean (Journal of Management Information Systems); and Venkatesh et al. (MIS Quarterly).

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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 Workday problem we are trying to solve is:

The current workaround is:

The business cost of keeping the workaround is:

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

## Worksheet Two · Map Workday Fit

Employee count

Countries

States or provinces

Legal entities

Cost centers

Supervisory organizations

Payroll providers

Benefits carriers

Critical integrations

Current reporting pain

Likely Workday scope

## Worksheet Three · Data Readiness

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Worker data | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Job architecture | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Position data | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Supervisory organization | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Cost center and finance dimensions | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Location and legal entity | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Compensation and pay group logic | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Benefits eligibility | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Security roles | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Historical data | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Reporting definitions | 0 0 0 0 0 |

## Worksheet Four · Reporting Governance

Define the owner, source logic, approved definition, report type, security model, and review cadence for each metric.

Headcount ........................................

Turnover ........................................

Open positions ........................................

Vacancy ........................................

Labor cost ........................................

Worker type ........................................

Cost center ........................................

Location ........................................

Manager hierarchy ........................................

## Worksheet Five · AI Activation Readiness

Which Workday AI capabilities do we already own?

Which manual HR or Finance workflows create the most pain?

Which user groups would need training and trust-building?

What metric would prove AI adoption is working?

## Worksheet Six · First 90 Days

### 0 to 30 days

Stabilize core workflows, payroll and finance handoffs, integrations, defects, access issues, and user support.

### 31 to 60 days

Normalize reporting, manager self-service, employee workflows, security requests, and support ownership.

### 61 to 90 days

Optimize configuration, clean reports, improve adoption, activate practical capabilities, and transition to SmartCare.