

Guide

Stop Managing Your Workforce. Start Building Workforce Resilience.

Key practices for unifying systems, controlling labor costs, and addressing talent shortages.



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Human challenges, system solutions.

Manufacturers are used to change and volatility, but today's challenges are stressing companies to their foundations.

On top of digital transformation and the rise of AI, the industry faces wildly unpredictable global dynamics, generational shifts in the workforce, and a variety of talent shortages and skills gaps.

In the flurry of opinions about these issues, one fact often gets lost:

Most workforce problems today are system problems, not people problems.

In fact, when your workforce management (WFM) practices are rooted in a unified, AI-native, extensible platform, you gain a new way of thinking about your workforce and a new set of competitive advantages. Your workers feel less like individual costs to manage and more like a single strategic lever to enable business growth and transformation. In difficult labor markets, your organization becomes a destination of choice. Growth happens at the speed of opportunity, not the speed of your tech stack.

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There's a word for all this: resilience. To be a resilient manufacturer is to expertly prepare and plan ahead, which we discuss throughout the rest of this guide. These three priorities form a new playbook for solving the most pressing challenges manufacturers face—and building a more resilient future.

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Executive summary.

Most workforce management problems today are system problems, not people problems. In order for organizations to achieve resilience in the face of change, they must navigate three interrelated steps to business transformation:

- 1 Gain the power of a unified, AI-native, extensible platform
- 2 Control labor costs, complexity, and volatility
- 3 Overcome generational change and talent shortages

As we discuss in detail, the digital platform is critical to unlocking all of these other benefits—and untold future benefits as the world of manufacturing continues to evolve.

Playbook for manufacturing resilience.

WFM transformation is the strategic operational lever for organizational resilience—and therefore a competitive advantage waiting to be seized.



1. Gain the power of a unified, AI-native, extensible platform.

Resilience: The new imperative.

Resilient manufacturers are those that prioritize several key growth areas—and achieve that growth using the right digital foundation. You'll notice how much these overlap with workforce planning issues:

- **Adopting AI-driven operational planning and decision-making** to move quickly and decisively in downturns or times of organizational stress, such as M&A processes. This enables companies to find the opportunity in the disruption, transforming as needed without compromising uptime or key business metrics.
- Leveraging AI on a unified data foundation for **advanced automations and extensibility**. A proper digital backbone allows you to evolve at the speed of business while providing the right insights at the right time, unlike fragmented legacy systems that hinder agility and obscure critical data.
- **Optimizing your workforce for maximum agility** before acute challenges arrive. This often includes leveraging advanced workforce planning approaches, hiring and recruiting practices, and talent management systems to unlock workforce potential. It also covers operational elements such as optimized job profiles and streamlined job and talent data analyses.

For much more about resilience, read our companion guide, [“Manufacturing Resilience: Why Some Companies Thrive Through Disruption—and How to Be One of Them.”](#)



Benefits across the workforce lifecycle.

A unified platform affects every aspect of a manufacturing organization, from the shop floor to the C-suite. It enables you and your teams to move beyond legacy tech stacks and into a new world of continuous advancement, informed agility, and resilience against current or future global disruptions.

Here's what that looks like as a digital ecosystem:





This ecosystem enables continual WFM system improvement and seamless deployment of new functionality across the organization. On the day-to-day level, expect to see the following shifts:



AI automation saves time.

Next-gen AI and AI agents empower workers and automate processes for managers.



Meet your dynamic workforce needs.

Whether you need to move resources around or set up new processes, a flexible platform makes it possible.



Move fast with actionable insights.

Visualize workforce costs and trends while identifying ways to optimize your people and operations—all in one place.



Clock in and clock out, like clockwork.

A mobile-native, people-first platform helps everyone—from leadership to floor workers—improve time tracking, scheduling, and adding or dropping shifts.

The result is a new paradigm of WFM where old barriers are gone, current challenges are mitigated, and future opportunities are visible ahead of time and attainable.

Workday: A history of AI.

Workday was born in the cloud and was an early pioneer of AI. By building AI into the core—instead of bolting it on after the fact—we've amassed the largest and cleanest dataset in the industry, which is critical to creating the best AI models and deploying fast, game-changing updates and innovations, including, but not limited to, AI agents and our [Agent System of Record](#). You can see in our history how we've prioritized WFM over time.



2021

- Scheduling and Labor Optimization generally available
- Time and Scheduling Hub
- Time Anomalies



2022

- Flextime Schedules
- Manage Work Schedule Calendars—Mass Correct



2023

- Static Scheduling
- Shift Auditing
- Predictive Scheduling



2024

- Demand Forecasting
- Configurable Sales and Productivity
- Mass Shift Actions
- Geofencing by Scheduled Location
- Centralized Scheduling



2025 R1

- Workday Time Kiosk
- ML Prompts for Time Type
- Minor Worker Availability Compliance
- Mass Edit Schedules



2025 R2

- Frontline Agent
- Contractual Hours on Schedule
- Multiple Assignments
- Preferred Days/Time on Schedule
- Mobile Edit and Approve Time

A unified WFM approach, before and after.

Before	After
Legacy systems and point solutions, often patched together with custom work-arounds, offer bare-bones functionality without providing strategic advantage or agility.	A unified, highly extensible digital foundation gives your business—from human capital management (HCM) to finance and operations—one source of truth and the agility to adapt at the speed of business.
Discrete tasks and processes related to the workforce are laborious and expose many potential failure points; they degrade the personal experiences of working for your company.	Functions such as scheduling, time tracking, absence management, and many other core WFM functions are modern and scalable—whether you’re managing a global workforce, a frontline team, or anything in between.
AI is technically difficult and operationally limited. ROI comes slowly, and AI is difficult to scale or apply throughout the company. Advances such as agentic AI are difficult to integrate.	AI is built into the core architecture, extending across your entire business according to needs, not technical limitations. Your company is AI-native.

Values we deliver.



Planning cycle accelerated by about 70%



Makes demand-planning 4x more efficient



Consolidated 20 disparate systems into 1



Reduced total cost of ownership by 30%



Mass assigns up to 50,000 candidates to recruiters at a time



Pulls global workforce cost reports in 2 hours instead of 2 days

Video walk-through:

[What’s under the hood of manufacturing HCM and WFM systems?](#)



2. Control labor costs, complexity, and volatility.

Once you have a clear concept of your ideal digital ecosystem, you can address the two key challenges that fill the rest of this guide:

- 1 Controlling labor costs, complexity, and volatility
- 2 Overcoming generational change and talent shortages

In manufacturing, the workforce is one of the most significant—and difficult to control—cost drivers across the organization. We're sure you feel the pressure. It doesn't have to be that way.

That's because there are so many untapped sources of cost savings hiding in your systems and structures. Almost always, seeing and exploiting them starts with your digital backbone and new applications of AI.

Consider the following representative examples. Anything ring a bell? These are not exhaustive looks at everything a unified platform does, but they'll show you how deep your system constraints can reach into your WFM and daily performance.



Example 1: The apparently simple no-show.

Consider the typical no-show. This common manufacturing workforce event can create a cascade of burdensome, transactional tasks and concerns that divert human sweat and attention from more valuable work.

Any given morning might look like this:

- Record the absence
- Release the shift
- Notify workers to replace
- Inquire with the missing worker
- Notify the manager
- And so on . . .

Workday automates these processes using an AI agent, which can take the load completely away from your internal staff—and conduct these important operations more quickly and accurately.

Example 2: The person you don't have to hire.

For another source of cost and complexity control, take the example of recruiting and hiring. This has always been a constant need and resource drain in manufacturing, and today's skills gaps and talent shortages make it even more so.

But, just like Benjamin Franklin is reputed to have said, “A penny saved is a penny earned,” you could also say that an employee saved is an employee hired. Except it's better than that, since retaining a talented existing employee can require dramatically less expense, time, and people power, and it also gives you a surer return on investment than new and untested personnel.

With Workday Illuminate™, a range of new, responsive tools are at your disposal to engage, develop, and retain your existing workforce like never before—putting recruitment agility front and center and relieving many traditional pressures.



It's about elevating your humans.

The scenarios above are great examples of AI being used to elevate your humans, not replace them—a key Workday philosophy and the driving force behind our [Elevating Human Potential](#) research.



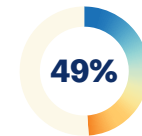
Proving it: Time back, money back.

Manufacturing is one of the largest and most important segments for Workday, and this gives us excellent data on outcomes and ROI. The results below are from real Workday customers and are routinely achieved by customers across a range of industries, including manufacturing:

Continue simplifying technology architecture.

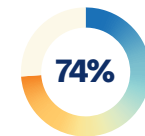


improvement in seamless data integration between HR, time, and payroll systems



improvement in ability to respond to business needs (update configuration/processes, build analytics)

Deliver more operational efficiencies.



reduction in late timecard corrections per pay period



reduction in manual interventions (retros, calculations, etc.)

Improve experiences and effectiveness.



improvement in mobile access for employees/managers for time processes



improvement in employee satisfaction with time administration

These outcomes are the quantitative validation of a long-standing Workday priority: freeing your organization from burdensome tasks that have traditionally diverted people from more meaningful, value-generating contributions. In manufacturing, your people are the true engines of innovation and imagination that allow you to stand out in dense markets and grow in low-margin, high-volatility environments.

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3. Overcome generational change and talent shortages.

In environments of scarcity, resilience comes from smarter planning, improved agility, and more engaging experiences that unleash the potential of your people. Here's how Workday solutions help organizations operationalize smarter approaches to talent shortages and generational workforce changes.

Optimized workforce planning.

- Workday democratizes AI-powered scheduling to align staffing levels with demand, helping to minimize gaps caused by talent shortages. This contrasts with legacy modes of planning, which tend to be disjointed among business divisions.
- It also enables real-time insights into labor needs, skills gaps, and workforce costs to support strategic, confident decision-making at the speed of business—rather than the speed of your siloed data streams.

Skills-based initiatives.

- Platform unification and AI-driven skills functionality allow organizations to identify and track employee skills, making it easier to redeploy or upskill workers to meet evolving needs.
- This encourages internal mobility and reskilling, which are both essential buffers as older workers retire and new generations enter the workforce.



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Flexible and personalized experiences.

- To a significant degree, workforce management is about digital experience management. Since Workday supports flexible scheduling, mobile self-service, and other modern tools, younger generations get the efficiency, autonomy, and digital-first experiences that help them add maximum value as workers.
- Workday also enhances employee engagement and retention, especially among Gen Z and Millennials.

Compliance and reporting.

- Workday brings significant automations to compliance, reporting, and labor processes, freeing the workforce for more value-adding work and ensuring consistent and fair treatment across diverse workforce groups.



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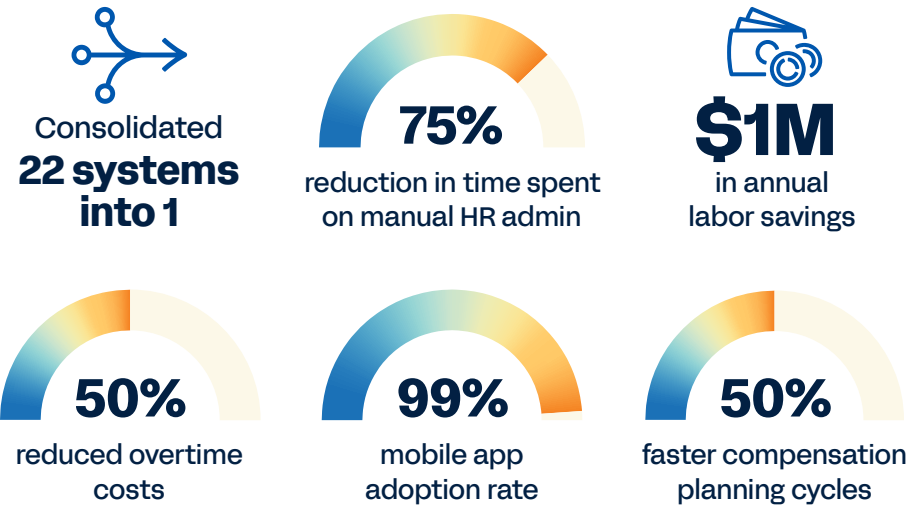
These and other WFM factors allow organizations to adapt to workforce changes, engage multigenerational talent, and address labor shortages proactively instead of reactively—keeping ahead of the next disruption and the competition.

Benefits for any persona.

Modern WFM using a unified platform such as Workday impacts everyone. Here are some of the benefits that proliferate across the company when you update your approach to the workforce:

Operations	HR	IT
Minimized cost and complexity of change; lower risks associated with innovation	Move from a “job” to a “career” service provision mindset with increased strategic influence across the business	Reduced time spent on non-value-adding work, such as maintaining old tech stacks and responding to tickets
Improved shift coverage and efficiency of scheduling, payroll, and other critical functions	Improved worker loyalty and retention through human factors such as belonging and job satisfaction	Simplified architecture offering a single view of people data, modern security, elimination of silos, and one source of truth

Customer experiences: ROI on Workday WFM.





AstraZeneca: Elevating talent and bringing innovations to market faster.

Global life sciences manufacturer AstraZeneca struggled to find, cultivate, and allocate internal workers to alleviate talent shortages.

So the company deployed Workday and used its built-in AI features to identify skills gaps, elevate the best talent, and provide HR with a system that could scout and source talent across the entire organization—adding a new competitive edge, leaders say.

Mina Makar, senior vice president for U.S. Respiratory, says AstraZeneca can now “accelerate how quickly we’re able to deploy innovations, how quickly we’re able to staff roles, [and] how quickly we’re able to move our talent internally within our teams.”

For more across manufacturing:

Read many more [manufacturing customer stories online](#), filterable by industry, topic, and more.



Conclusion: The bottom line is the bottom line.

Why Workday, and why now?

Because WFM is the key to your resilience, profit, and growth. And because inaction is not free.

Just what are the costs of holding on to yesterday's WFM systems, you ask? You might know already, but we [broke it down in a detailed guide](#) so you can understand the cost of inaction.

Workday is the wise bet in manufacturing.

Workday is trusted by two-thirds of the companies included in the [American Opportunity Index Top 100](#), a powerful measure of worker opportunity and mobility across manufacturing and other key sectors. We are also used by the most dynamic and successful manufacturing innovators, each of which has proven the value of the Workday foundation in the rigors of the real world.



Continuing our innovation and building momentum in Workday Workforce Management.

4.4K+

Time Tracking
customers

5K+

Absence Management
customers

440+

Scheduling
customers

Look to Workday if you want to not just understand today's challenges but act on them. Start with the selected topics and priorities throughout this guide and continue the conversation with us directly. We're ready when you are.



67 of the American Opportunity Index top 100 Companies are Workday customers

Additional resources for resilient manufacturers.

[Workday for Manufacturing Buyer's Checklist](#)

We created this checklist to guide you through 12 essential WFM capabilities for achieving operational excellence and higher profitability in manufacturing.

[Workforce Management Buyer's Guide](#)

Here's a step-by-step breakdown of how to select a WFM system that adapts to change and is flexible, simple, and fast.