Build a Foundation for Real-Time Operations

A Guide for Buying Committees



UKG™

Work changes by the minute. Can you?

Workplace decisions need to happen in minutes, not reporting cycles. Yet many organizations still operate with disconnected systems that produce a lagging, fragmented view of their workforce, leaving leaders without the speed and confidence the moment demands.

Teams spend valuable time stitching together data from multiple sources, only to gain what amounts to high-definition hindsight. Sure, they may identify the scheduling issue that caused an employee to leave yesterday, but that insight does nothing to prevent the resignation today.

The result is operational fragility. And when labor represents over 50% of your operating expenses, blind spots and delayed decisions carry real financial consequences.

Your organization can't move forward if it's perpetually looking in the rearview mirror.

Knowing is good. Acting is better.

Real-time insight is the answer. Achieving it requires a technology foundation that connects workforce management, HR, and pay. When these functions operate together, issues are surfaced while you can still do something about it. Your technology shifts from a system of record to a system of action, enabling execution in the moment, where work happens — and where outcomes are either won or lost.

But gaining that level of visibility requires a shift. Leaders need to stop buying tools in silos and start building the backbone for running the business in real time.

Making real-time a reality: The buying committee reset

If real-time operation is your goal (and it should be), the buying process can't remain fragmented. Yet many buying committees begin from precisely that position. Conversations often center on justifying a point solution — a smaller piece of the puzzle designed to solve for one or two departments — rather than examining how systems interact across functions to advance shared goals. The result is a decision process that mirrors the very silos organizations try to overcome.

Friction is inevitable. Timelines stretch as proposals are rewritten and re-justified for different stakeholders. Workloads increase as each function builds a separate business case. Roadblocks multiply. In some cases, the initiative stalls altogether, resulting in lost time, sunk costs, and little progress towards goals.

It's time for a different approach.



The buying committee shift

When decisions move from siloed to shared, results follow.

Team-level impact	Organization-wide impact
Separate HR, Pay, and WFM tools	One unified workforce platform
One champion pushing a decision	Teams aligned on goals from the start
Slow decisions, rework, and stalls	Faster decisions and speed-to-value



When timing matters, everyone matters

Committees can make better buying decisions by rallying around the one priority that benefits everyone: the ability to operate in real time.

That shift starts with reconsidering the traditional categories of HR, payroll, and workforce management. Those labels may describe how software has been sold in the past, but they don't reflect the reality of work.

Instead, forward-looking buyers think of these functions as the core components of a workforce operating platform. When unified, they give leaders the ability to make decisions in the moment rather than rely on insights after the fact.

How to use this guide

This guide helps buying committees align around workforce technology that enables real-time operations.

You'll find:

- **Leadership perspectives:** How operating in the moment comes to life across roles
- **Refined requirements:** How to define technology needs with speed in mind
- **Proof in practice:** Data points and real workplace examples showing what's possible

Operations

The challenge

As an operations leader, you own the outcomes. You sit at the intersection of strategy and execution, responsible for turning plans on paper into performance. That requires acting in the moment instead of managing after the fact.

But too often, your team needs to pull data from disparate systems and manually reconcile reports to understand what work people are doing, when they're doing it, and its impact on the organization. Operational friction permeates, productivity stalls, and leaders are forced into reactive mode.

The solution

What you don't need is another report. You need a control room: a single system of action from which you can run the entire business — not just a corner of it — in real time. That requires technology that enables you to:

- Anticipate workforce and demand shifts with real-time insights that improve productivity and cost control
- Empower frontline teams with real-time visibility, communication, and control over their schedules
- Anticipate disruptions and optimize coverage and compliance across shifts and sites
- Build trust and efficiency with accurate, compliant payroll that reflects complex rules and labor agreements

> With labor data available at a glance, our store managers can make smarter staffing decisions in a quicker manner and are working less overtime themselves.
>
> **Katie Little**
> Labor Operations Manager, Costa Coffee



Operations

The result

When scheduling, pay, compliance, and performance are connected in one system, every operational adjustment has immediate, organization-wide impact. For example, if a worker calls out, you don't just see the gap, you fill it with the right person, strengthening engagement, performance, and margins in the process.

When decisions happen in the moment, with the full picture in hand, across every role, shift, and location, workforce agility becomes the standard. Your organization stays resilient, responsive, and ready for whatever's next.

The shift

Rather than serving as just the backbone of HR, workforce management becomes the operating system of the business itself — the infrastructure that enables real-time decisions across departments.



Real-time insight at work

An employee calls out. The manager reviews available coverage, weighing cost, seniority, skills, and attendance alongside a fuller picture — fatigue risk, likelihood of attrition, scheduling equity, and performance during peak hours.

With that context, a pattern emerges: the same employee has been covering last-minute shifts. The manager chooses someone else who hasn't been overscheduled, keeping coverage intact while reducing burnout and protecting costs.

Payroll

The challenge

Few things matter more to employees than being paid accurately and on time. When that doesn't happen, trust erodes quickly, putting retention at risk. In fact, 49% of employees say they would consider leaving after just two paycheck mistakes.

But payroll accuracy doesn't start with payroll. It starts upstream in workforce management, where time, schedules, and compliance rules are captured. And when time and pay operate in separate systems, discrepancies require manual fixes, updates lag, and risk increases.

The solution

Real-time insight changes the equation. When time and pay are connected, information flows continuously from hours worked to wages calculated. Issues surface as they emerge, adjustments are made before finalization, and regulatory changes apply automatically.

To support this way of working, your technology should enable you to:

- Deliver accurate paychecks on time by aligning time, pay, and policy data in one system
- Apply evolving labor laws, policies, and pay rules automatically across calculations
- Forecast labor spend based on predicted activity and align budgets to financial targets
- Connect data across systems to unify time and pay rules, and gain visibility across regions

The result

When your department operates with this level of immediacy, the impact compounds across the organization. Seamless compliance reduces risk, predictable labor costs protect margins, and accurate compensation avoids unnecessary costs and reinforces employee trust.

The shift

With real-time insight, the payroll function goes beyond merely processing pay to strategically protecting trust and performance.



Real-time insight at work

An employee finishes a shift that crosses into overtime and includes a late-night differential. As hours are recorded, pay rules are applied automatically, factoring in overtime thresholds, shift premiums, and local labor laws.

Before payroll is finalized, the system flags a discrepancy: a missed differential tied to part of the shift. It's corrected in the moment, before it shows up in the employee's check. At the same time, updated compliance rules are applied across the calculation and labor costs are automatically adjusted, showing leaders the impact right away.

Human Resources

The challenge

As an HR leader, you know engagement is only part of the equation. The real mandate is performance — ensuring your people strategy advances business outcomes. That responsibility places HR at a critical intersection, balancing what matters to employees — growth, workload, recognition, flexibility — with where the organization is under pressure: skill gaps, shifting demand, and productivity targets. Success depends on aligning those realities as they unfold.

Point solutions rarely provide this unified view. Engagement surveys capture sentiment at a single point in time, workforce plans rely on projected demand rather than live data, and attrition reports confirm who already left — not who's a flight risk.

Meanwhile, workforce management and HCM systems operate in parallel, with one focused on time and scheduling for hourly employees, and the other on talent and performance for salaried staff.

The solution

An integrated, real-time view changes how HR leads. Hiring can align to current demand levels to ensure efficiency. Career paths can be directed toward areas of emerging need. Workforce activity data can be analyzed alongside sentiment to identify which employees are high performers and the moments where certain actions can retain them.

For your HR team to operate in real time, your technology should:

- Identify the workforce moments that drive the greatest impact for both employees and the business
- Anticipate burnout, turnover, and fatigue based on live workforce activity trends
- Surface relevant insights in context and automate repetitive tasks with AI to support leaders at every level
- Establish reliable benchmarks the organization can measure against to define a high-performing workplace

> We're able to pinpoint positions with an unexpectedly long time-to-fill rate and reevaluate how we're bringing in talent.
>
> **Michelle Lemahieu**
> Director of HR Strategic Services,
> Gillette Children's Hospital



Human Resources

The result

When those capabilities come together, HR is connected to both business priorities and the moments that matter most to employees. They move beyond tracking engagement to driving performance — including the discretionary effort that fuels it — with a clear focus on outcomes and results.

The shift

For HR teams to more directly shape business performance, they'll have to change how they evaluate technology by focusing less on features within a function and more on real-time visibility across the organization. It's not just about seeing more. It's about seeing accurately, in context, and in time to act.



Real-time insight at work

A manager reviews workforce data alongside performance, skills, and upcoming demand. A pattern emerges: a high-performing employee has taken on more responsibility, while a growing area of the organization is short on experienced talent.

The manager immediately connects the two. The employee moves into the role, the team fills a critical gap, ramp up time is reduced, and the employee stays engaged because they have a path forward.

Finance

The challenge

As a finance leader, your charge is clear: ensure every asset is performing at its highest potential. And no asset carries more financial impact than your workforce. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, wages account for around 70% of total employer operating expenses. Yet in many organizations, insight into workforce cost, compliance exposure, and efficiency is scattered across disparate systems. Data must be reconciled before it can inform budgeting or investment decisions. But by the time finance has a full picture, opportunities to protect margin or reallocate spend may have slipped.

The solution

A unified workforce operating platform connects labor data directly to broader performance metrics. It complements your ERP, CRM, and IT systems, forming a power quad that gives you a complete, real-time view of performance.

Instead of chasing departmental inputs and aligning them manually to systems of record, finance leaders gain immediate visibility into how workforce decisions affect margins, revenue, and budget performance.

- Deliver fair, accurate, and efficient pay with streamlined processes that reduce administrative drag
- Provide executives with global financial visibility to support compliance and organizational health
- Optimize and automate payroll processes in ways that strengthen control and workforce confidence
- Unify payroll rules, standards, and data across regions to anticipate trends and act quickly

> Because the information is in real time, after closing out each pay period, we know exactly how we're tracking to our budget and how much we're projected to spend for the rest of the year.
>
> **Alicia Hunt**
> Division Head of HR, ARDOT



Finance

The result

With real-time insight, finance no longer needs to wait for month-end to see labor variances. Costs can be tracked against targets as they evolve and adjustments can be made while goals are still within reach. The payoff is stronger margin protection, tighter cost predictability, and faster alignment between financial strategy and operational execution.

The shift

Workforce data needs to be treated like financial data. It needs the same level of visibility, accuracy, and immediacy — fully integrated into how finance understands and manages the business.



Real-time insight at work

A finance leader reviews labor spend as it evolves and notices a pattern forming: turnover is rising in a specific region. As employees exit, hiring and training costs begin to climb, overtime increases to cover gaps, and productivity dips as new hires ramp.

Finance flags the cost impact early, partners with operations to adjust staffing and retention efforts, and reallocates budget before the increase compounds, keeping labor costs in check and operations on track.



Connected decisions, collective impact

Operations, payroll, HR, and finance approach workforce decisions from different angles, but they rely on the same data. And that data needs to reflect what's happening now.

When each function operates from separate versions of the truth, decisions pull in different directions. Operations may optimize for coverage while finance sees cost variance. HR may identify burnout risk while managers only see schedule gaps. Fragmented data leads to fragmented execution.

A single system of action connects workforce activity, pay, talent signals, and financial performance in one shared view. With that visibility, decisions stay aligned, action happens in real time, and the experience improves for employees and customers alike.

But shared outcomes require a shared commitment in the buying process.

When the goal is to achieve enterprise-wide results, every function must evaluate technology together, focusing on a foundation that will allow the entire organization to operate from the same trusted data, at the same time.

The next step is assessing whether your current environment — and the vendors you're considering — can truly support that standard.

A capability assessment for operating in real time

Turning strategy into action requires structure. A buying committee's role is to translate the ambition of operating in real time into clear evaluation criteria. The following questions can help you assess vendors against the capabilities required to move from hindsight to immediate insight. They elevate the conversation from checking features to choosing a foundation. The objective is to enable true real-time operation powered by trusted, connected data that allows leaders to act with speed and confidence.

1 Clarify what category of technology you're purchasing

The objective is not another HRIS, HCM suite, workforce management tool, or standalone payroll engine. It's a Workforce Operating Platform, which should include:

- ☐ One unified data layer across HR, pay, and workforce management
- ☐ An embedded, agentic AI layer that delivers fast recommendations, automates repetitive tasks, and supports real-time analysis
- ☐ Continuous regulatory updates that apply across the system
- ☐ An ongoing partnership and service model — not just software

2 Evaluate how decisions are currently made within your organization

- ☐ How often are actions taken after issues occur versus anticipating risks before they escalate?
- ☐ How consistently do financial results align with forecasts, and how quickly can variances be explained?
- ☐ How well do current success metrics connect to enterprise strategy?

3 Assess your data integration model

- ☐ How many steps are required to reconcile HR, pay, and workforce data today?
- ☐ Are you relying on ETL processes, data dictionaries, or data warehouses?
- ☐ If so, how old is the data by the time leaders see it and what does that infrastructure cost?

4 Consider enterprise-wide impact

- ☐ How effectively can employees self-serve and adapt to business needs?
- ☐ How well can each function articulate its value across the committee?
- ☐ Where does AI sit in your environment — embedded within core systems or layered on as another disconnected tool?

From records to readiness

Most organizations have invested heavily in digitizing the past. They've built systems that record what happened, reconcile it, and report on it later. Meanwhile, work is happening now, even as you read this. Customers are arriving, patients are checking in, orders are being placed. The challenge is no longer simply capturing time punches; it's ensuring that the right person, with the right skills, is on the right schedule at the precise moment demand peaks.

When readiness becomes the focus, execution gaps begin to close. But the impact goes much further than reduced risk, overtime, and labor leakage. Employees gain access to shifts that fit their lives and grow their career. They develop trust in their employer, discretionary effort increases, and the business is better positioned to deliver on its mission.

That's what operating in real time looks like — and it's how you turn your workforce into your competitive edge.

Real results

Jetro Restaurant Depot

$1.8M

saved in annual candidate sourcing and employee onboarding costs by streamlining high-volume hiring

NHS Management

10-day

reduction in time-to-hire, resulting in earlier access to talent and better care delivery

2 Sisters Food Group

5,000

hours saved in employee time and exception processing, freeing up HR for higher-value work

The George Washington University

4.5 hours

saved a week in student position processing by modernizing payroll operations

Bunzl

$300k

saved annually in HR operating costs thanks by reducing administrative work and gaining greater visibility, consistency, and control.

The Campbell's Company

$1.35M

saved in seven weeks by modernizing workforce management, which included standardizing policies, reducing integrations, and ensuring zero missed payroll deadlines



UKG for real-time operations

UKG's Workforce Operating Platform connects HR, workforce management, and pay. It holistically manages all aspects of people and labor, from recruiting and hiring to engagement, scheduling, management, and payroll.

At its core is a unified data layer that treats your workforce not as a set of siloed files, but as a living, breathing network where skills, work and pay are interconnected. On top of that foundation sits a Workforce Intelligence layer trained on the largest dataset of workforce behavior in the world. This enables context-aware insight that reflects how work actually happens. It knows that a nurse's fatigue signal in a Level 1 trauma center is different than a retail gap on a holiday weekend.

Because this intelligence is embedded within the system itself, it doesn't simply report what occurred; it anticipates patterns as they form and guides workers toward timely action. This is what we call putting workforce understanding to work.

Ready to lead from insight instead of hindsight?

Start a conversation with our team or check out our hub of real-time insight resources.

About UKG

UKG is the Workforce Intelligence Platform that puts workforce understanding to work. With the world's largest collection of workforce insights, and people-first AI, our ability to reveal unseen ways to build trust, amplify productivity, and empower talent, is unmatched. It's this expertise that equips every worker to deliver experiences that set their brand apart — because great organizations know their workforce is their competitive edge.



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