UKG™

Operate in Real Time Playbook

For Operations, HR, Finance, and Workforce Leaders



How real-time workforce data closes the gap between plans and reality

As a business leader, you know that workforce plans are necessary. You also know that reality doesn't always follow the plan. Demand shifts. Employees call out. Costs change. Coverage gaps emerge. Service expectations evolve.

And still, many organizations rely on insights that aren't accessible in the flow of work and that can't keep pace with what's happening right now.

Data that lives in spreadsheets or static reports can help leaders identify patterns and connect the dots between labor, productivity, and outcomes. But without real-time context, decisions stall, opportunities are missed, and there's no way to influence outcomes in the moment.

Operating in real-time helps leaders make strategic, impactful decisions at the moment when reality deviates from plans. We call this the "Signal, Call, Exhale" framework. Part of being able to operate in real-time means having access to current, in-the-moment data. But more importantly, it means having the organizational capacity to recognize change (the signal) sooner, understand its potential impact (make a call), and act while there is still time to make a difference (exhale because a solution happened without the scramble).

Why does real-time data matter?

In today's environment, traditional reports can't keep up with evolving labor availability, employee sentiment, compliance risk, and cost pressures.

Organizations that rely on backward-looking data are forced to react after issues surface. Conversely, those that operate with real-time workforce visibility can anticipate change, intervene earlier, and sync decisions across teams.

Leading with real-time data is essential to building a high-trust, high-performance organization — one that plans for the future but has the proactive insights and flexibility to adapt (and succeed) in the moment.

Organizations with advanced insights-driven capabilities are nearly three times more likely than less mature organizations to report double-digit year-over-year revenue growth.[1]



What can you do about it?

To drive real change, workforce data must do two things continuously:

1. Provide timely visibility into how work is actually happening, not just how it happened last month
2. Translate insight into action for different roles across the organization

Think of it as **Signal**, **Call**, **Exhale**:

- **Signal**: Something changes in the business or workforce. Demand shifts, coverage changes, labor pressure emerges, or priorities move.
- **Call**: A leader needs to make a decision based on what's happening now—not what was true yesterday.
- **Exhale**: The organization can carry out that decision without the scramble, manual work, or disconnect that often follows.

When data is accessible, contextual, and delivered at the right moment, it stops being a reporting exercise and becomes an operational advantage.

50% A study by Wavestone showed that 50% of organizations now say they are "competing on data and analytics," up from 40.8% in 2023.[2]



See all your workforce signals

Most organizations reactively track familiar workforce metrics — turnover, payroll accuracy, headcount, absences. These indicators are often reviewed in isolation, on a delayed cadence, and primarily for reporting purposes.

But when an emphasis is placed on real-time workforce signals, that can quickly translate to business outcomes. Real-time data can surface operational risk, cost exposure, workload imbalance, and employee strain while there's still time to act.

By organizing workforce data across HR, payroll, talent, and workforce management in a single, unified view, leaders gain continuous awareness of how decisions ripple across the organization.



Here are a few powerful ways connected, proactive workforce data supports real-time operations.

Staffing gap

Connecting changes in coverage with workforce demand, availability, and labor cost shows you:

- Where coverage may fall short
- Where overtime pressure may increase
- Which roles or shifts are most exposed
- Potential impact on service and productivity

With an up-to-date view, managers can adjust coverage, offer open shifts to qualified employees, or address overtime risk before the gap affects service.

Unexpected absence

Viewing absences alongside schedules, skills, and employee availability shows you:

- Where critical skills may be unavailable
- Which employees or teams may absorb additional workload
- Where replacement options are limited
- Potential impact on workforce experience

When an absence is reported, managers can quickly identify qualified, available replacements or redistribute work — and communicate changes to the affected team.

Demand spike

Connecting changes in demand with staffing, workload, and labor capacity shows you:

- Where workforce capacity may not match demand
- Which locations or teams face the greatest pressure
- Where labor costs could increase
- Potential impact on customer or business outcomes

As demand shifts, leaders can move available employees to high-pressure areas, adjust schedules, or make a timely decision about additional hours.



Operating in real-time improves both workforce and business outcomes. In an experiment at Gap Inc., better scheduling had a positive impact on productivity, sales, and labor hours.[3]

Schedule disruption

Bringing schedule changes together with availability, workload, and business demand shows you:

- Where plans are falling out of alignment
- Which downstream activities may be affected
- Where competing workforce priorities are emerging
- Where earlier intervention may limit disruption

A current view of schedule changes helps managers update assignments, coordinate handoffs, and address conflicts before they affect other teams or planned work.

Open headcount

Connecting vacancies with labor cost, time to hire, and business priorities shows you:

- The business impact of prolonged vacancies
- Where existing teams are carrying a greater workload
- Which hiring needs are most critical
- Longer-term workforce capacity needs

Leaders can use workload and coverage data to prioritize hiring and identify where schedule adjustments or additional support may be needed.

Accrual activity

Bringing accrual balances together with absences, overtime, and scheduling patterns shows you:

- Where time-off patterns may create future coverage pressure
- Potential indicators of workforce fatigue
- Where schedule flexibility may be constrained
- Opportunities to better balance employee and business needs

Monitoring these patterns helps managers plan coverage, reduce overtime, and adjust schedules proactively.

What real-time workforce insight must deliver for every leader



Operating in real time using the Signal, Call, Exhale framework helps leaders recognize change, understand what it means, and act while they can still influence the outcome.

Workforce management helps organizations understand and manage what's happening across the workforce and a strong workforce operating platform helps translate those signals into coordinated action.

To support this sequence, real-time workforce insight must deliver five core capabilities:

Continuous visibility

Leaders need a clear view of what's happening now across staffing, schedules, labor costs, and workforce activity. This is how they recognize the signal as it emerges, rather than relying on a retrospective summary.

Connected context

Workforce signals need to connect across HR, payroll, finance, and operations. That context helps leaders understand why something is happening and how it may affect other teams or business priorities.

Early risk signals

The most useful insight surfaces risk before it becomes disruption — whether that's burnout, staffing gaps, cost overruns, compliance exposure, or declining trust. Earlier signals give leaders more time and options to make the call.

Guided action

Insight alone isn't enough. Leaders need clear guidance on possible next steps so they can make informed decisions quickly and confidently, without waiting for additional analysis.

Timing that matches decisions

Insight needs to arrive in the flow of work, while leaders can still intervene and influence outcomes. Coordinated action should follow the decision without delays, manual work, or disconnected handoffs.

Leaders need a clear view of what's happening now across staffing, schedules, labor costs, and workforce activity. This is how they recognize the signal as it emergaes, rather than relying on a retrospective summary.

Glen — Operations leader

Glen is accountable for keeping manufacturing operations on plan — matching qualified people to production needs while managing output, labor costs, and team workload.

Signal: What changes in his day

When one production employee calls out, coverage, line capacity, shift workload, and overtime risk can change at once. If the role requires a specific skill or certification, options to fill the gap may be limited.

Call: What Glen needs to know

Glen needs to know which qualified employees are available, where the absence could constrain production or downstream work, and how each coverage option could affect output, labor cost, and employee workload.

Exhale: What's possible with real-time workforce insights:

With proactive workforce signals, Glen can:

- See how the absence affects line coverage, production priorities, and downstream handoffs
- Reassign a qualified, available employee or adjust the production schedule
- Address overtime pressure before approving added hours
- Coordinate with HR and the people manager to limit disruption and protect team wellbeing



74% of employers say it's hard to find skilled talent.[4]

80% At Simpson Manufacturing, managers cut scheduling time by up to 80%, saving more than 300 hours a year.[5]

Gia — HR leader

Gia helps keep workforce decisions in sync with business needs, employee wellbeing, and compliance. When a manufacturing employee calls out, HR can connect attendance, skills, and schedule data to help leaders find coverage while considering workforce impact.

Signal: What changes in her day

An absence can change skill availability, scheduled hours, overtime exposure, and workload across the affected shift. Patterns in absences or repeated coverage requests may also point to emerging fatigue or retention concerns.

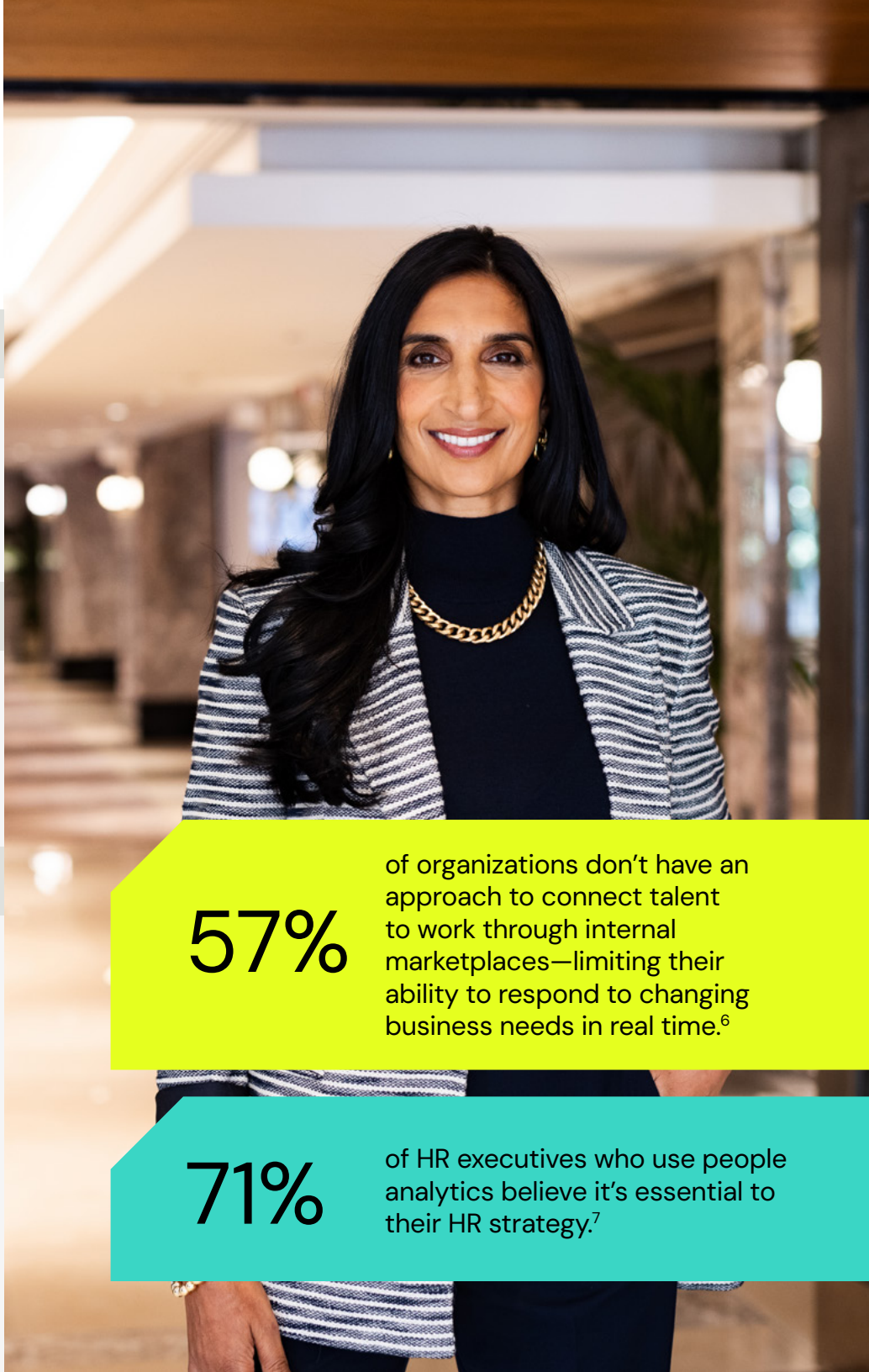
Call: What Gia needs to know

Gia needs to know who is qualified and available to cover the work, whether a proposed change syncs with workforce policies, and whether the response is shifting strain to the same employees.

Exhale: What's possible with real-time workforce insights:

With proactive workforce signals, Gia can:

- Surface qualified coverage options using current skills and availability
- Help operations check hours, overtime, and applicable policies before changing assignments
- Watch for repeated absences or workload patterns that may signal fatigue or retention risk
- Keep employees informed about schedule changes and support needs



57% of organizations don't have an approach to connect talent to work through internal marketplaces—limiting their ability to respond to changing business needs in real time.[6]

71% of HR executives who use people analytics believe it's essential to their HR strategy.[7]

Taylor – Finance leader

Taylor is responsible for maintaining cost discipline, forecasting accurately, and protecting margins while helping leaders assess the financial effects of workforce decisions. A single absence can create a choice between overtime, reassignment, temporary coverage, and adjusting production plans.

Signal: What changes in her day

The absence can shift hours worked, overtime, labor cost per unit, and expected output on the affected shift. As managers respond, actual labor costs may move away from forecast before a period-end report shows it.

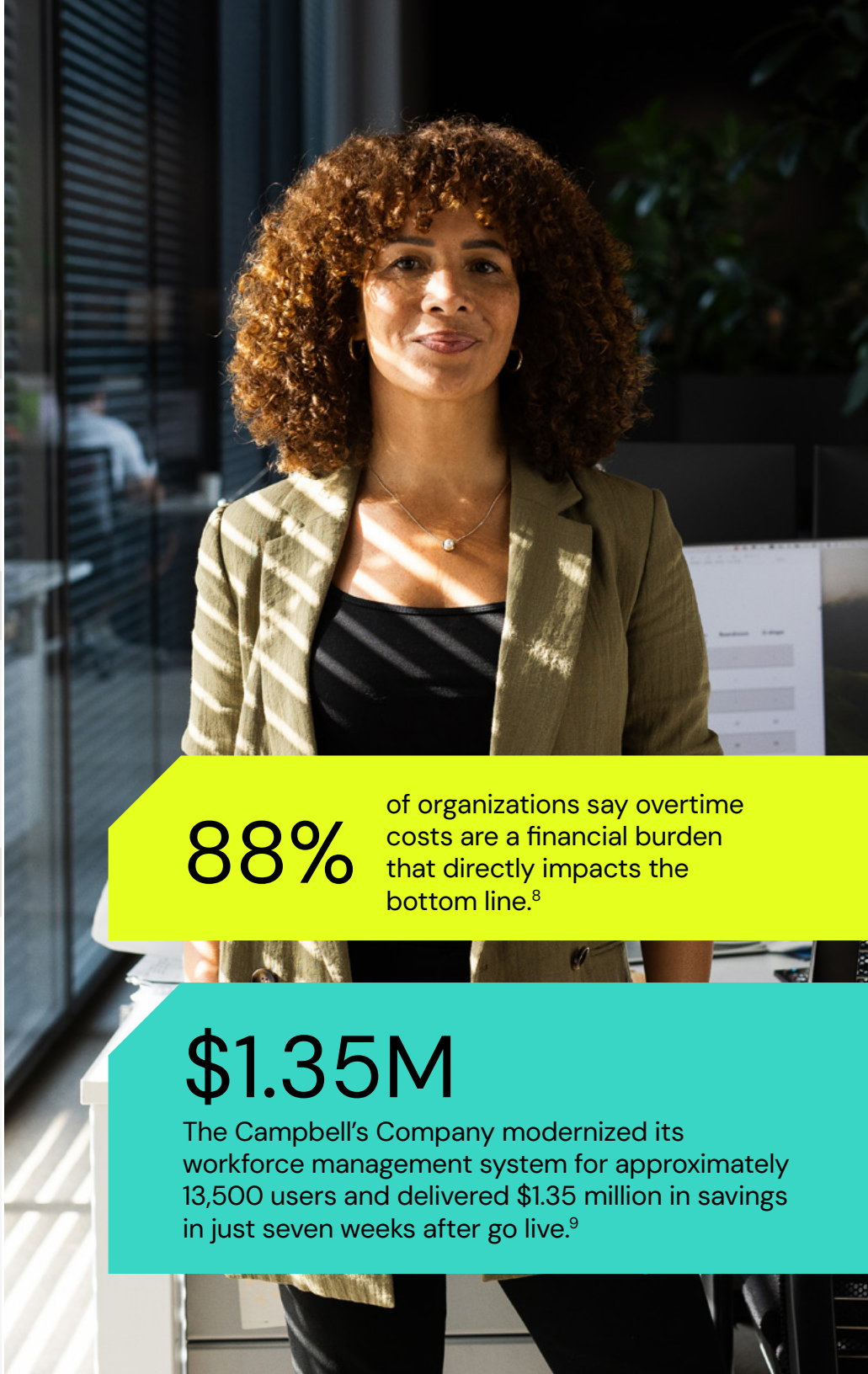
Call: What Taylor needs to know

Taylor needs to see the likely cost and production impact of each coverage option — such as overtime or temporary labor — and how the absence changes current labor forecasts and margin expectations.

Exhale: What's possible with real-time workforce insights:

With proactive workforce signals, Taylor can:

- See overtime and labor cost pressure as coverage options are considered
- Compare the cost of added hours with the impact of adjusting production priorities
- Partner with operations and HR to support needed coverage within labor targets
- Update forecasts while the variance is emerging, not after period close



88% of organizations say overtime costs are a financial burden that directly impacts the bottom line.[8]

$1.35M

The Campbell's Company modernized its workforce management system for approximately 13,500 users and delivered $1.35 million in savings in just seven weeks after go live.[9]

James — People manager

James supervises the manufacturing shift where an employee has called out. He needs to keep production moving while ensuring that remaining employees are assigned work they're trained and able to perform. A current view of attendance, schedules, skills, and hours helps James focus on the choices that matter now instead of piecing together reports or reacting after the team is already under pressure.

Signal: What changes in his day

The absence can leave a work cell short, alter the skill mix, and shift tasks or overtime to remaining team members. Production priorities and handoffs may need to change during the shift.

Call: What James needs to know

James needs to know which qualified employees are available, what work must be prioritized, and whether a reassignment or extra hours could overload employees or conflict with safety qualifications and hours rules.

Exhale: What's possible with real-time workforce insights:

With proactive workforce signals, James can:

- Find qualified, available coverage using current shift and skill information
- Rebalance assignments or adjust production priorities before the team falls behind
- Check hours and overtime before adding work to the same employees
- Tell the team what has changed and where they can get support



41% A UKG analysis found that employees working 20% fewer hours than scheduled had a 41% annual turnover rate.[10]

Managers gained real time visibility into staffing and coverage, enabling faster approvals and better support for employees requesting time off or shift changes.[11]

Martina — Employee

Martina works on a manufacturing team where one employee's unexpected absence may change assignments, shift coverage, or overtime needs. She balances her schedule with responsibilities outside work and values consistent hours and flexibility. Clear, timely updates help Martina understand what work is changing and decide whether she can take an available shift or help with a revised plan

Signal: What changes in her day

A callout can open a shift, change the work assigned to a cell, or affect the hours and workload of employees already on shift.

Call: What Martina needs to know

Martina needs to know whether her schedule or assignment is changing, what skills a task requires, how many hours she is expected to work, and how any added shift affects her pay.

Exhale: What's possible with real-time workforce insights:

With proactive workforce signals, Martina can:

- See schedule updates and available shifts that match her qualifications
- Choose whether to pick up a shift or request a swap based on her availability
- Understand changed assignments, expectations, and pay implications
- Plan around work and know where to raise questions or workload concerns



76% of frontline employees globally feel burned out.[12]

Frontline employees who use AI at work report significantly lower burnout (41%) compared to those who do not (54%).[12]

Business benefits

Organizations that operate with real-time workforce visibility see measurable advantages — both for their people and their business. When insight is delayed or disconnected, the opposite is often true.

Resilient workforce

Leaders can identify where investment in people will have the greatest impact —improving engagement, retention, and productivity.

- Burnout among frontline employees remains alarmingly high, with 76%reporting burnout in 2025—up from 75% the year prior.[12]
- At organizations that score highly on purpose and trust, 88% of employees look forward to going to work every day.[13]

Confident managers

Managers who have timely insight and clear guidance are better equipped to support their teams and lead through change.

- Managers with timely insight and guidance are better equipped to act before issues escalate.
- An analysis from Forrester found that a proactive support experience reduced support ticket volume by 50%.[14]

Proactive risk management

Early visibility into compliance gaps, fatigue, or cost exposure helps avoid disruption before it escalates.

- According to a survey by KPMG, more than half of compliance leaders are actively investing in data analytics as a top driver of budget increases, with 53% naming it a priority.[15]
- Thomson Reuters Institute survey revealed that 65% of respondents said streamlining and automating manual processes would help reduce the complexity and cost of risk and compliance.[16]

Sustained performance

Consistent, trusted data reinforces strong culture and drives long-term business results.

- 88% of organizations say overtime costs are a financial burden that directly impactsthe bottom line, reinforcing why real time labor visibility is critical to sustained performance.[8]
- Forrester found that proactive reporting practices reduced expensive overtime instances by 30%.[14]

Real-time operations help organizations shift from reacting to workforce challenges to preventing them.

Conclusion

At its highest potential, workforce data is not a rearview mirror — it's a living source of operational intelligence. Operating in real time means more than seeing what is happening. It means turning change into a clear signal, giving leaders the context to make the call, and enabling teams to act without the scramble.

That sequence — Signal, Call, Exhale — depends on workforce plans built on a strong foundation, timely insight when conditions change, and connected context to understand what those changes mean. With workforce management, HR, pay, intelligence, and AI working together, organizations can respond while there's still time to influence the outcome.

Workforce insight can then become an operational advantage: leaders make better decisions, managers act with confidence, and employees feel supported and informed.

Data becomes a foundation for transparency—syncing people, priorities, and performance across the organization.

Is your organization ready to operate in real time

Use this quick check to assess whether your workforce plans, visibility, and decision-making can keep pace with changing conditions. Mark each item Yes or Not yet.

	Yes	Not yet
Can leaders see changing workforce conditions early enough to respond?		
Can managers understand the business impact of those changes?		
Can workforce plans adapt when demand or availability changes?		
Can leaders connect workforce decisions to cost, service, productivity, and employee outcomes?		
Can teams act before issues escalate?		

If the answer isn't consistently yes, your workforce strategy or current technology stack may not be keeping pace with how quickly your business operates.

Ready to put real-time workforce operations into practice?

Explore the Buyer's Guide to Operating in Real Time ›

Sources:

1. Forrester, Data-Driven Insights and AI: Informing and Automating Complex Decisions (May 31, 2024), found at https://www.forrester.com/blogs/data-driven-insights-and-ai-informing-and-automating-complex-decisions/.
2. Wavestone, 2024 Data and AI Leadership Executive Survey (2024), found at https://www.wavestone.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/data-ai-executive-leadership-survey-2024.pdf.
3. Saravanan Kesavan, Susan J. Lambert, Joan C. Williams, and Pradeep K. Pendem, Doing Well by Doing Good: Improving Retail Store Performance with Responsible Scheduling Practices at the Gap, Inc. (Management Science, November 2022), found at https://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/10.1287/mnsc.2021.4291.
4. UKG, 2026 Megatrends Shaping Tomorrow's Workforce, The Workforce Institute at UKG (2026), found at https://www.ukg.com/learn/resources/megatrends-knowledge-center.
5. UKG, Simpson Manufacturing Customer Story, UKG (2024), found at https://www.ukg.com/customers/simpson-manufacturing.
6. Mercer, Global Skills Technology and Adoption Survey Report (May 2025), found at https://www.mercer.com/insights/talent-and-transformation/skill-based-talent-management/global-skills-technology-and-adoption-survey-report/.
7. SHRM, The Use of People Analytics in Human Resources: Current State and Best Practices Moving Forward (May 2023), found at https://www.shrm.org/content/dam/en/shrm/research/use-of-people-analytics-in-hr.pdf.
8. UKG, 2025 Manufacturing Trends Report (2025), found at https://www.ukg.com/learn/resources/industry-brief/2025-manufacturing-trends-report.
9. UKG, UKG Innovation Award Winners Showcase AI Led Workforce Transformation, UKG (2025), found at https://www.ukg.com/company/newsroom/record-number-ukg-innovation-award-winners-showcase-power-ai-led-workforce-transformation.
10. UKG, Accurate Schedules Drive Lower Turnover (and Better Business Outcomes) (2025), found at https://www.ukg.com/learn/resources/white-paper/accurate-schedules-drive-lower-turnover-manufacturing.
11. UKG, Hartford HealthCare Customer Story, UKG (2024), found at https://www.ukg.com/customers/hartford-healthcare.
12. UKG, More Perspectives on the Frontline Workforce (2025), found at https://www.ukg.com/learn/resources/white-paper/more-perspectives-frontline-workforce.
13. Workplace Intelligence, We Need to Fix Work (2022), found at https://workplaceintelligence.com/we-need-to-fix-work-study/.
14. Forrester Consulting, The Total Economic Impact™ of a Strategic Partnership with UKG: Maximizing UKG Value With Personalized Customer Support, Peer Community, and Experience Tools (July 2026), commissioned by UKG, found at https://tei.forrester.com/go/UKG/UKGPartnership/?lang=en-us.
15. KPMG, Implementing tech and data-driven compliance (July 2023), found at https://kpmg.com/kpmg-us/content/dam/kpmg/pdf/2023/implementing-tech-and-data-driven-compliance.pdf.
16. Thomson Reuters, 2023 Risk & Compliance Report (2023), found at https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/10/2023-Risk-Compliance-Report.pdf.

About UKG

UKG is the Workforce Operating Platform with unified HR, payroll, and workforce management, built to solve the unique challenges of frontline work. Powered by people-first AI and decades of labor data, UKG turns workforce intelligence into real-time decisions around staffing, pay, compliance, and productivity, enabling every worker to confidently take action as work happens. That's why more than 80,000 organizations worldwide trust UKG to run their workforce — not just manage it. Learn more at ukg.com.

UKG™

HR, Pay, & Workforce Management

© 2026 UKG Inc. All rights reserved. For a full list of UKG trademarks, please visit ukg.com/trademarks. All other trademarks, if any, are property of their respective owners. All specifications are subject to change. CMKT103-USv2