Viewpoint

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Gain Full Value in Workforce Management Software

The world of work has changed dramatically in recent years, from the types of workers to where, how and when they complete their work, to the ways they are engaged. The pace of this change has been bolstered by the ability of technologies to support it, most notably through the proliferation of cloud-based workforce management (WFM) applications making it easier to connect and communicate, to access and analyze data, and to adapt to meet specific workforce needs much more quickly and economically than possible with legacy on-premises systems. Our approach at Ventana Research is to assess the requirements for vendors' products using our Value Index according to evaluation categories like Capability and an overall Validation of the customer experience the vendor provides.

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As WFM applications have become more sophisticated, so have the requirements of the organizations using them. They have grown far beyond the world of time keeping and schedule making. Today's systems now provide process automation, self-service, communication, collaboration, planning and analysis, and reporting and system security capabilities related to four major automation pillars: forecasting and scheduling work, absence management, time and attendance, and activity and task management. Our experience and market conversations lead us to believe that by 2024, three-quarters of organizations will have identified use cases that specify HCM system requirements for optimum organizational agility. With WFM systems at the heart of daily operations, it's important that buyers look for the types of capabilities that will enable that agility.

All that power and capability should provide a wealth of opportunity for organizations to profitably meet their business objectives through proper deployment of their workforce, but there is plenty of room for pause when making the buying decision. It's easy to get caught up in fancy technology demos and dreams of employees being automatically prompted to make that missed timecard punch, complex work schedules getting optimized at the touch of a button, and one-stop employee access to all HR-related information. But during the evaluation process, don't forget these key considerations that provide insight into possible future innovations.

Organizations can have complex needs, and technology must be able to support a variety of scenarios, workflows and, usually, integrations. With software as robust as the leading WFM systems, buyers

generally see only a small portion of its features and functionality during the sales process, and all demonstrations are generally configured to reflect a "happy path" of everything going right. It's critical to map as many processes as possible prior to making the buying decision so that vendors demonstrate how their systems can be configured to fit the specific needs (if customization is required), or will it require workarounds or not be feasible at all. This extends beyond initial implementation, as business requirements change. The software must remain relevant and support as shifts in organizational structure, geographies or legislation lead to process changes. It's equally important that the vendor is an expert in WFM, not just technology. Understanding how changes in laws and regulations are applied is as important as the capability of the software itself.

Often, the biggest hurdle to technology adoption at scale is the failure of the organization to consider the readiness of its user base for large-scale change. Feature-rich WFM software can drive desired business outcomes for an organization, but only to the extent that leadership can articulate the "what's in it for you" message to key stakeholders. Successful deployment depends on behavior changes across the workforce, so a vendor that includes tailored communication and change management as part of its implementation and ongoing support model will add tremendous value to the overall partnership.

As time lapses, certain risks increase. People leave or change roles, taking with them the knowledge they had at the time of deployment, and vendors continue to develop new capabilities. This means it's possible that when the time comes to roll out more functionality, the organization may look very different than at the start of the deployment. That is why the vendor itself can be just as important as the software it provides. Look beyond software up-time guarantees and support hours, and into the company providing WFM technology and the roles that it is designed to address. Vendors must be able to work in tandem with their customers, monitoring system utilization and compliance, and must be willing to work with organizations on location, if needed, to ensure continual alignment of the overall solution with evolving business goals.

This requires a core commitment to customer success, drawn from depth and breadth of organizational knowledge specific to WFM. Organizations should examine the mission, vision, values, financial performance, geographic footprints and growth strategies of the vendor and critically evaluate whether it has the capability and sustainability for organizational evolution. For the best long-term outcomes, your vendor should have the desire and capability to provide a long-term relationship.

Software providers will continue to innovate, applying the latest in technological advances and new capabilities to their offerings in support of their customers' business needs. The most successful will strive to be a step ahead, vigilant in their monitoring of social and economic trends and legislative and regulatory changes, serving as an effective business partner to support with the right features and functionality, at the right time, over time. Remember that while technological capability is critical, so is the vendor relationship to provide the resources and the depth and breadth of that capability.

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Quincy Valencia leads the human capital management (HCM) expertise at Ventana Research and guides HR and business leaders in best practices and technology covering HCM applications, suites and platforms, including these specific focus areas: continuous payroll, employee experience, learning management, talent management, total compensation management and workforce management.