



Speaking the Same Workday

Why HCM Terminology Alignment Determines Implementation Success



A STRATEGIC GUIDE TO SHARED HCM VOCABULARY AND
FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS



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→ Executive Summary

Most Workday HCM implementations don't stall because of the software. They stall because HR, Finance, and IT are using the same words to mean different things.

Terms like organization, position, job profile, and compensation package carry specific, interconnected meanings in Workday, meanings that often differ from how those same words were used in a legacy system or a prior process. When that gap goes unaddressed, it doesn't just create confusion in a workshop. It drives rework in configuration, rescoping in the SOW, and rebuilding after go-live.

This whitepaper makes the case for treating shared HCM vocabulary as foundational project work, not a documentation exercise. It walks through the core concept domains that shape a Workday HCM tenant, spotlights the two areas where misalignment tends to cost the most (Job Catalog and Compensation), and outlines a structured approach to building alignment early, before configuration decisions are made instead of after they need to be undone.





Introduction



Every Workday HCM implementation begins with a set of assumptions. Stakeholders assume they know what a “position” is. They assume “cost center” means the same thing to Finance as it does to HR. They assume the SOW and the system will naturally line up. Those assumptions are rarely true on day one.

Workday's data model is highly interconnected: organizations drive staffing, staffing drives compensation eligibility, job profiles drive both compensation and recruiting, and security is layered across all of it. A misunderstanding in one area rarely stays contained. A job profile built without a clear view of how it will be used in compensation and recruiting becomes a source of rework in both.

This is not a knowledge gap unique to any one customer. It is the natural result of teams that have spent years operating in a legacy system, developing their own internal shorthand for people, pay, and process, being asked to adopt a new, precise, and unfamiliar vocabulary all at once.

The organizations that move through implementation with the fewest surprises are not the ones with the most technical expertise. They are the ones that treat shared vocabulary as a deliverable: something to be built deliberately, early, and cross-functionally, rather than absorbed passively along the way.



What Is a Shared HCM Vocabulary?



A shared HCM vocabulary is a common, cross-functional understanding of the foundational concepts that structure a Workday HCM tenant, one where HR, Finance, IT, and business stakeholders use the same terms to mean the same things, and understand how those terms connect to one another.

This goes beyond a glossary. Workday's foundational concepts, organizations, staffing models, job catalog, compensation, business processes, and security, are not independent. They form a connected system. A decision made in one area, such as how job profiles are structured, has direct downstream implications on others, including compensation defaulting, recruiting requisitions, and reporting and analytics.

A shared vocabulary means stakeholders can:

- Describe how the organization's structure maps to Workday's organization types: Supervisory, Cost Center, Location, Company, Pay Group, and Custom
- Explain the difference between Job Management and Position Management, and why the organization chose one
- Understand how a job profile decision affects Compensation, Recruiting, and Talent simultaneously
- Recognize where legacy-system terminology will not translate directly into Workday, and why

When this understanding exists before configuration begins, workshops move faster, SOW scoping is more accurate, and fewer decisions need to be revisited after go-live.



Key HCM Domains at a Glance

Workday HCM is organized around a set of foundational domains. Understanding each at a high level, and how they connect to one another, is the first step toward a shared vocabulary.

Organizations

The basic building blocks in Workday, used to group workers for business process routing, security, analysis, and reporting. The core types are Supervisory, Company, Cost Center, Location, Pay Group, and Custom Organizations.

Staffing

Governs how positions and jobs are created and filled, and how the employment lifecycle (hire, job change, termination) is managed. Every organization selects between two staffing models: Position Management, which offers tighter control seat by seat, and Job Management, which favors speed and flexibility.

Job Catalog

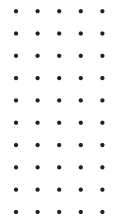
The structure of Job Profiles, Job Families, and Job Family Groups that describe every job or position in the organization. The Job Catalog is foundational to Compensation, Recruiting, and Talent, and is covered in more depth in the spotlight section below.

Business Process

The structured steps, approvals, and routing logic that move a task (a hire, a job change, a termination) from initiation to completion. Business processes carry their own security policies, conditional logic, and notifications.

Security

The framework that controls what a given user can see and do. Security is organized into functional areas and domains, with access granted through user-based security groups (tenant-wide, tied to a person) or role-based security groups (tied to a position or organization).



Key HCM Domains at a Glance Cont.

Recruiting

Manages the candidate lifecycle from job requisition through offer, including job postings, career sites, prospects, candidates, and dispositions.

Compensation

Defines how workers are paid, and who is eligible for what. Built around the Compensation Package, which is covered in more depth in the spotlight section below.

Onboarding

A structured process for integrating new workers, spanning preboarding (before day one) through onboarding tasks, plans, and engagement tools once a worker has started.

Payroll

Covers pay groups, period schedules, payment elections, earnings and deductions, off-cycle payments, payslips, and year-end reporting.

Time Tracking

Governs how time is entered, calculated, validated, and sent to payroll, using time clocks, time blocks, time entry templates, and work schedules.

Absence

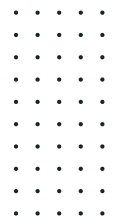
Manages time away from work, including time off types, accruals and balances, and leave of absence types and impacts.

Benefits

Defines benefit groups, plans, and enrollment events (open enrollment, qualifying events, and passive events), along with beneficiaries and dependents.

Reporting & Analytics

The data sources, business objects, and fields that power delivered and custom reports, worklets, and dashboards across the tenant.



→ **Spotlight: Where Misalignment Costs the Most**

While every domain matters, two areas act as connective tissue across the rest of the system. Getting Job Catalog and Compensation right, and understood, early has outsized impact on downstream success.

Job Catalog

The Job Catalog, built from Job Profiles, Job Families, and Job Family Groups, is one of the most cross-functional structures in Workday. A single Job Profile decision reaches well beyond HCM:

- **Compensation** – the compensation grade on a job profile defaults into job requisitions, offers, and new positions
- **Recruiting** – the job profile summary and description default into requisitions and postings, saving manual entry
- **Talent** – job profiles marked as Public Jobs surface in the internal talent marketplace, where Workday's machine learning matches employees to opportunities based on job title, description, and summary
- **Rules** – job profiles, families, family groups, and management level are commonly used to define eligibility and condition rules across other functional areas

A Job Profile can only carry one Compensation Grade, one Management Level, and one Job Description, which makes the initial build decisions difficult to walk back. Two jobs that differ on any of those three elements need two separate job profiles. Several elements that feel like they belong in a job profile, such as Time Type, Standard Hours, Supervisory Organization, and Worker Type, are not stored there at all, and are instead assigned through other parts of Workday. Job profiles can also be shared across countries (when management level, description, and grade match) or restricted to specific countries or organizations, which has real implications for how large a catalog needs to be.



→ **Spotlight: Where Misalignment Costs the Most Cont.**

Because maintenance of the Job Catalog is centralized, deciding who owns its creation and upkeep early in implementation, and being disciplined about only including information the organization plans to maintain, is one of the highest-leverage decisions a project team makes.

Compensation

Core Compensation covers the fundamental components of an employee's pay: base salary, bonuses, and benefits, structured through the Compensation Package.

- **Guidelines** – Grades and Grade Profiles define pay ranges (minimum, midpoint, maximum) for jobs; Grade Profiles allow additional levels, such as region or location, within a grade
- **Plans** – Compensation Elements that connect to Payroll Earning Codes, covering salary, hourly, allowance, bonus, merit, commission, and stock plans
- **Compensation Basis** – groups compensation components together to manage by basis total, common in global configurations or for sales populations

Compensation Eligibility Rules determine who is eligible for a given package, grade, grade profile, or plan, based on attributes like location, region, job profile, or management level. Critically, a grade or plan only defaults automatically during staffing events if it has been added to the Compensation Package; any new plan or grade created after implementation needs to be added to the Package as well, or it will not default the way stakeholders expect.



Business Value of Terminology Alignment

01

Faster, More Productive Workshops

When stakeholders share a vocabulary going in, workshop time is spent making decisions rather than defining terms.

02

Fewer Downstream Surprises

Decisions made in cascading domains like Job Catalog and Compensation ripple through Recruiting, Talent, and Reporting correctly the first time.

03

More Accurate Scoping

SOW commitments reflect a genuine shared understanding of terms and structure, rather than assumptions that surface as gaps later.

04

Stronger Cross-Functional Ownership

HR, Finance, and IT can co-own configuration decisions because they are working from the same mental model of how the system fits together.

05

A Better Foundation for Future Optimization

Organizations that build a shared vocabulary early are better positioned to move through post-go-live maturity: cleaner documentation, clearer ownership, and a stronger base for the optimization work that comes next.



Implementation Framework

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO BUILDING SHARED VOCABULARY EARLY

01



Establish the High-Level HCM Flow

Start with a high-level walkthrough of how data moves through Workday HCM, from organizations and staffing through compensation, business process, and security, before diving into the details of any one domain.

Align on Key Terms and Concepts

Walk cross-functional stakeholders through core definitions using a shared reference guide, covering Organizations, Staffing, Job Catalog, Compensation, Business Process, and Security.

02



03



Review SOW Call-Outs Against the Vocabulary

Confirm that scoped decisions in the SOW map cleanly to the agreed-upon definitions, and flag any mismatches while they are still easy to resolve.



Implementation Framework Cont.

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO BUILDING SHARED VOCABULARY EARLY

04



Document Legacy System and Current-Process Context

Capture how the organization handles job changes, compensation changes, terminations, hires, and onboarding today, including which legacy systems are in play and where that terminology will not map directly into Workday.

Spotlight Job Catalog and Compensation Decisions

Because these two domains cascade into the most other areas of the system, give them dedicated discovery time rather than folding them into a general terms review.

05

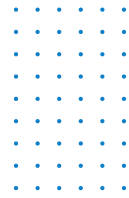


06



Capture Notes, Action Items, and Owners

Document open questions, decisions made, and who owns each follow-up item, so alignment doesn't erode between sessions.



→ How Syssero Helps

You do not have to build a shared vocabulary alone. Syssero's LEAP methodology is designed to bring HR, Finance, and IT stakeholders to a common understanding of Workday HCM before configuration decisions are locked in.

LEAP Workstream Familiarization Workshops

Best for organizations early in implementation

Structured sessions that walk stakeholders through the HCM flow, key terms and concepts, SOW call-outs, and legacy-system context in a single, guided format.

- Guided walkthrough of the Workday HCM Terminology Guide
- Dedicated deep-dives on Job Catalog and Compensation
- SOW alignment checks against agreed definitions
- Legacy-process and current-state documentation
- Clear action-item and ownership tracking between sessions

Reference Documentation & Ongoing Enablement

Best for organizations mid-implementation or post-go-live

Durable reference materials that keep vocabulary consistent as teams and configurations evolve.

- Workday HCM Terminology Guide as a standing reference
- Job Catalog and Compensation deep-dive guides
- Onboarding materials for new HR and IT team members
- Refresher sessions as teams and ownership change

Conclusion

A Workday HCM implementation is not only a configuration project. It is a language project. The organizations, staffing models, job profiles, and compensation structures that make up the system are deeply interconnected, and misunderstandings in any one area rarely stay contained.

Building a shared vocabulary early, before configuration decisions are made rather than after they need to be undone, is one of the highest-leverage investments a project team can make. It leads to faster workshops, more accurate scoping, and a stronger foundation for the work that continues long after go-live.

By treating terminology alignment as a deliverable rather than an assumption, HR, Finance, and IT leaders can move through implementation with fewer surprises, and build a Workday HCM environment the whole organization actually understands.



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Thank You



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