PEOPLE + TECHNOLOGY.

A workforce management minefield or an investment in the future of work?

Sara Golding | James Matthias | MIRUS AUSTRALIA 2018
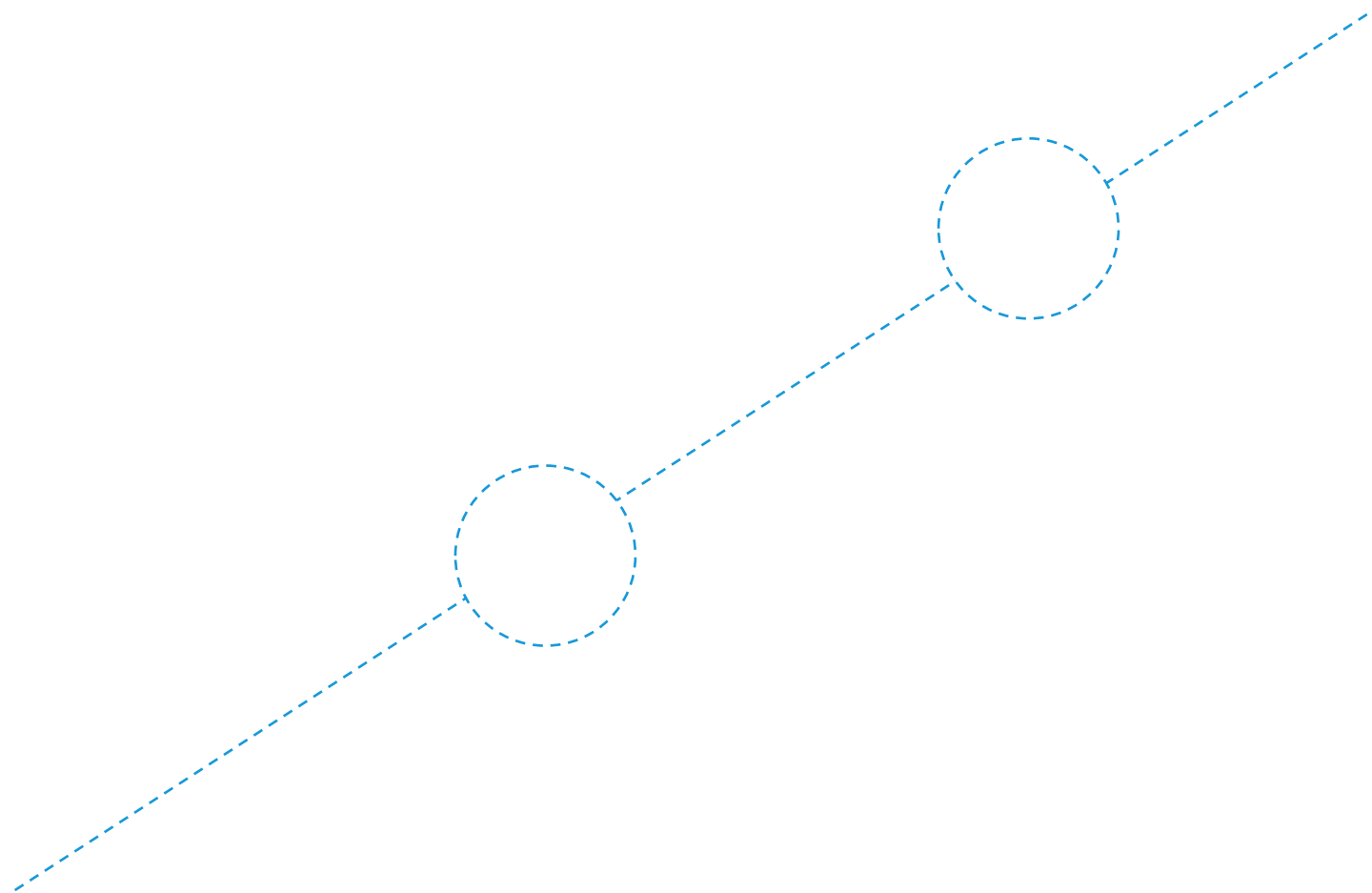
INTRODUCTION

–

Google 'workforce management' for over 5 million results! So how do you begin to select the right solution to optimise performance across your organisation? Traditionally, workforce management solutions centred on rostering staff for particular shifts but have evolved to include time management with a further integration of demand-oriented tools to optimise the scheduling of staff at peak times. Some workforce management solutions focus on serving specific industries, while others offer a one-size-fits-all platform. Some are designed for small businesses specifically, with other solutions targeted at large complex businesses. Despite all of this, most workforce management solutions companies will claim to be the best-fit solution for your business!

Workforce management solutions can be deployed enterprise-wide and through mobile platforms. Specialised software is used in numerous technology-based solutions such as ERP (enterprise resource planning), SLM (service lifecycle management), CRM (customer relationship management) and HR (human resources) management. Each of these systems can either be implemented as a standard software program (named off the shelf) or with some minor customisation. Whereas in larger or more complex organisations, a full customisation approach is used to address specific business needs.

Let's review some of the options in more detail . . .

PEELING BACK THE LAYERS

–

We often hear that our client's workforce management problem is technology. That is, they believe that their current system does not meet their needs as they grow their facilities and workforce, always with the constraint of financial sustainability. However, by peeling back the layers across the organisation we are able to quickly ascertain whether it is a technology problem, or a people challenge. Or both.

One of the key considerations in moving from where you are today to where you want to be, is making sure you have the right people and the right skills in place. This isn't always immediately possible, but it is sometimes necessary to consider organisational change to achieve the desired results. Once the right people are in place, you can better understand if the appropriate tools and training to effectively carry out their roles are also in place. It is important to recognise that the right people will utilise technology more effectively to achieve the best results for your organisation now and into the future.

So, how do you choose the right system for your organisational needs? Should you choose an industry specific specialist or a broader generalist to work with? And how much customisation will you need?
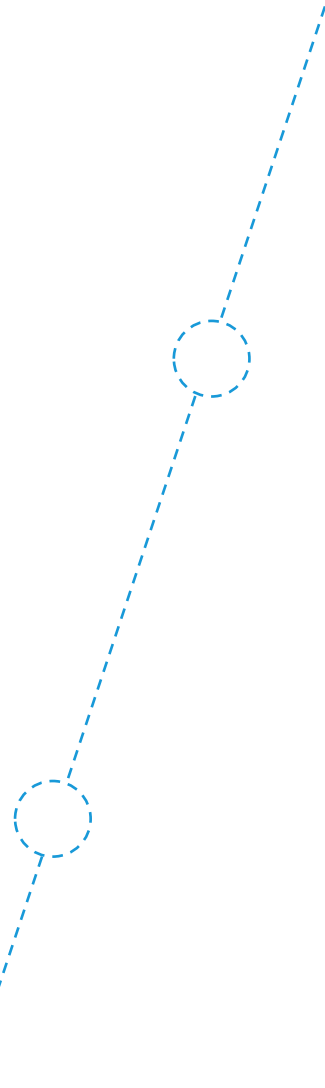
TO BUY, TO BUILD OR CO-SOURCE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

_

**Generic (off-the-shelf) vs customised system solutions**

A frequent question asked is whether to choose a customised solution or a generic off-the-shelf commercial system?

Customised systems are often at the forefront of workforce management functionality and can become industry best practice as a result. They can be tailored to meet an industry's specific needs. Generally, the market (end user) is often consulted in the development of these products and therefore will have more relevant feature releases that improves the product.

Whereas, *off-the-shelf* commercial systems are typically more generic and cannot be tailored to specific industry needs. They may not include the latest industry best practice features, which can lead to inadequacies and gaps in your workforce management system. These gaps could lead to compliance issues which could be detrimental to your organisation.

So, when considering a workforce management system, there are two options to now consider:

• Generic off-the-shelf system or
• A customised solution
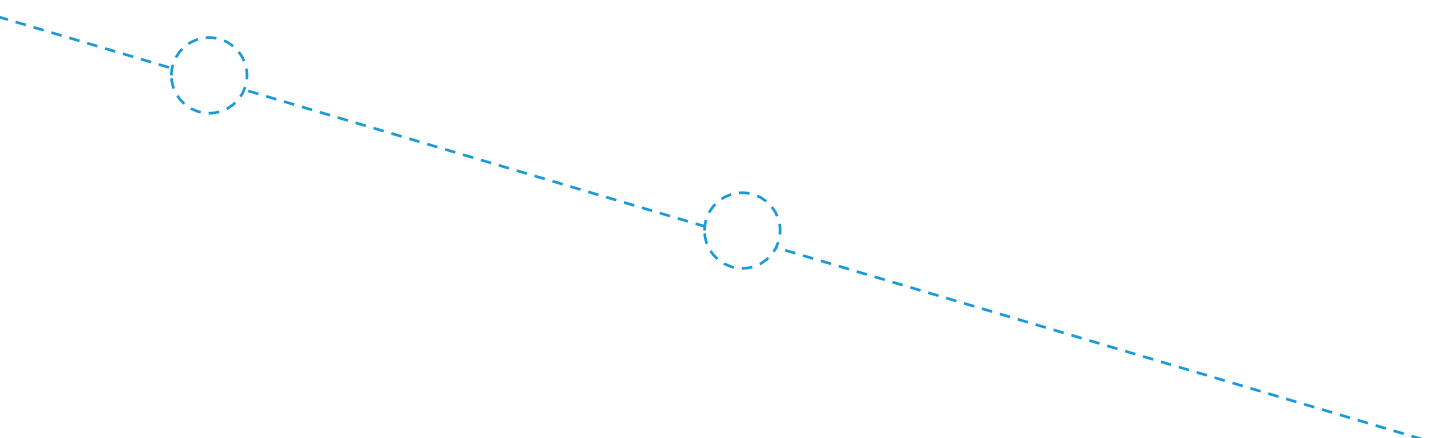
TO BUY, TO BUILD OR CO-SOURCE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

–

Industry specialist vs generalist solutions providers

Based on your decision whether to use an off-the-shelf or customised workforce management solution, the next decision centres around choosing the right workforce management solution provider. There are two types of solution providers. They are either an industry specialist or a generalist.

There are many benefits in choosing an industry (or niche) specialist. The main advantage is that they will have inherent knowledge of your industry. The advantage of this is that they will be quite familiar with the needs and nuances of your industry based on their previous experiences. This is especially important if your industry is governed by stringent regulations. For instance, the aged care industry has particular compliance requirements around staffing, such as state-based award rules and rates and work place qualifications as well taking into account resident care needs.

Whereas, a generalist solutions provider i.e. a vendor that doesn't serve or specialise in any one particular industry or sector will generally provide a solution to fit across many industries and not necessarily address specific industry needs. Therefore, a generalist may not completely understand the complexities of your organisation and there could be a lot of 'learning' for the vendor to get up to speed with your business needs.

On the other hand, a generalist may bring new thinking and technology solutions that can greatly improve your business and solve your challenges in better ways. Sometimes an industry generalist may make assumptions or try to retrofit a solution and not fully explore all possibilities. Therefore, it is important to choose a solutions provider based on their approach of uncovering your needs further and understanding the challenges and issues you are facing rather than pushing forward with a technology first approach.

Therefore, when considering a workforce management system, there are now several options to consider based on your needs:

- Generic off-the-shelf system,
- Customised solution from an industry generalist or
- An industry specialist with a customisation approach.
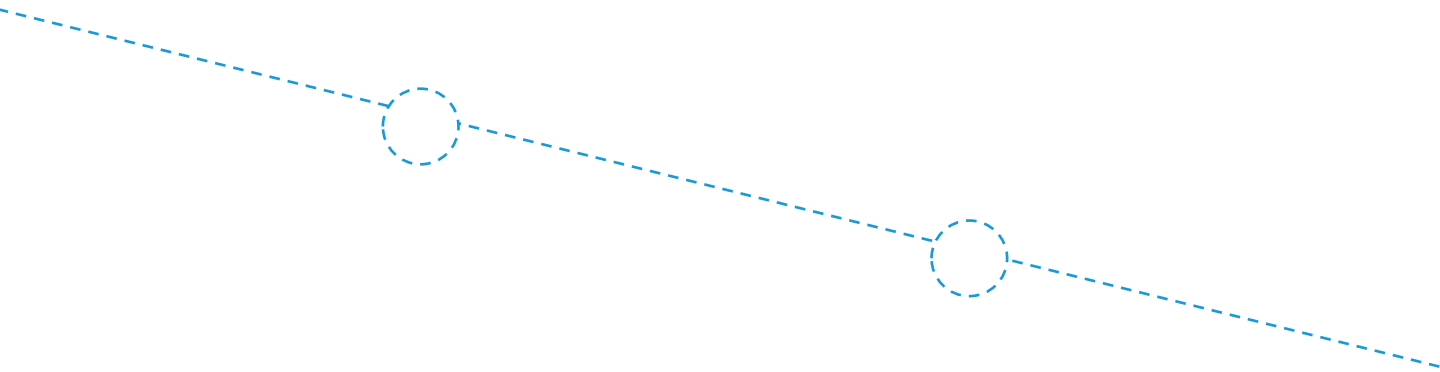
TO BUY, TO BUILD OR CO-SOURCE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

_

Lack of funding for training

One of the common problems companies face when implementing a workforce management solution is the lack of budget for training. Additionally, the following points need to be considered:

1. The customisations options available are limited and often costly to make.
2. Enterprise systems are expensive.
3. There is often a lack of quality workforce reporting (the largest cost of the business). When organisations have insufficient mechanisms in areas such as overtime, leave, award / EBA compliance and time keeping capabilities, it puts the organisation, its employees, and its budgets at risk.

Another challenge is that Enterprise systems work best when the workforce they are tracking is a homogenous one, made up primarily of full time employees, consistent payroll policies and simple work rules. While in the Aged Care environment, organisations have combinations of workforce varying from permanent employees to casuals and agency staff as well as volunteers, leading to more complex rules and policies to be managed for each.

TO BUY, TO BUILD OR CO-SOURCE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

–

Integration

It is important to consider the integration requirements for both niche and Enterprise applications. Take the time to understand which system will be the 'source of truth' for your data and how often the data flows between the two or more applications for example.

Cloud vs on premise storage solution

Cloud technology is a popular choice for organisations wanting to avoid major up-front investment. It's highly scalable, meaning it can expand and shrink with your organisation. Customers receive enhancements and upgrades quickly and easily. A recent article published on Forbes tech suggested that the worldwide cloud computing market is projected to increase from $67B in 2015 to $162B in 2020.

The benefits of cloud technology are well understood and many organisations are adopting a 'cloud first' policy rather than the more traditional on-premise solutions. Ensure you ask your supplier where in the world your information or data centre actually is and the implications, such as:

- Workplace management data is considered personally identifiable information and is protected by law in Australia. Take time to understand your legislative obligations regarding security and privacy and ensure your supplier is able to accommodate them.

- Australian Privacy Principles (APPS) have clear guidelines and rules for handling data sovereignty – the disclosure of personal data crossing local borders. Ensure your supplier has taken 'reasonable steps' to make sure the rules of the APPs are not broken.

IS TECHNOLOGY THE SILVER BULLET?.

How will the supplier understand your business to ensure that along with the technology, the necessary changes are made within the organisation and to people and process? The change management involved in a workforce management implementation is significant and too many suppliers just come in gather data requirements, implement their solution and then leave - and if you are lucky the email of a relationship manager whose core skills sit within their own technology platform rather than your business.

Ask the provider how they keep up with the changing trends in your industry and how these are included in the future product roadmap. It's important that providers talk to the industry and really understand the requirements from a client perspective.

"For Australian residential aged care providers facing increasing pressure on margins due to demands on the clinical team, workforce management optimisation is one of the wisest investments any organisation can make."

Sara Golding
MIRUS AUSTRALIA
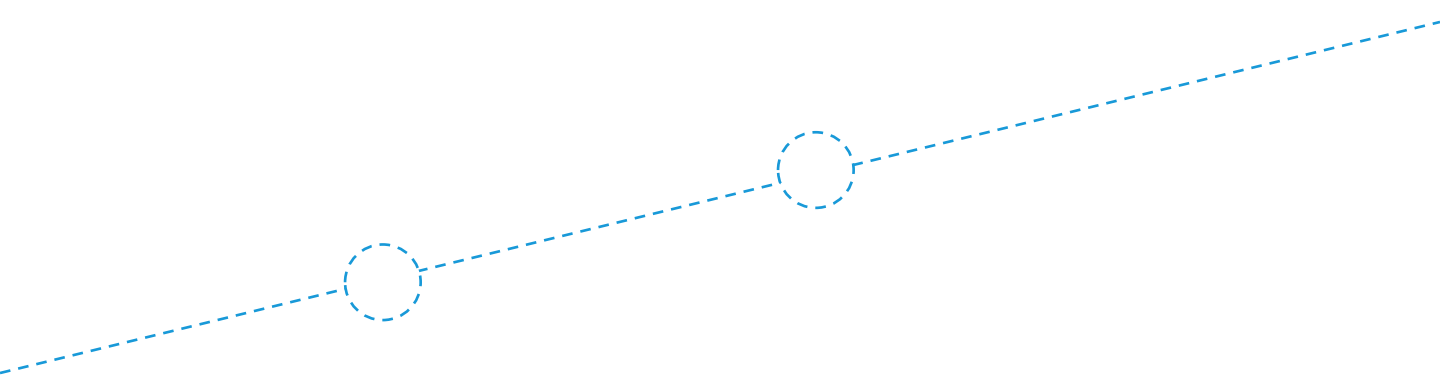
CO-SOURCE: PEOPLE + TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP.

Does the technology really meet the needs of your industry?

Don't just ask about the technology but ask about the services the provider offers pre and post implementation and question whether this sufficiently supports your organisation into embedding a solution that provides you with the necessary tool as well as the return on investment expected.

Ensure the right people in your organisation are involved and have a voice. Seek support from the CEO, CFO, IT, HR and Payroll teams who are typically involved in these types of projects. But what about the main users of the application, the Roster Administrators? You'd be amazed at the pertinent questions asked by a Roster Administrator during the buying process that could really help you make the right decision for the organisation.

You can have all the features, bells and whistles in the world but if a supplier doesn't package that with the necessary consultative support pre and post implementation, organisations will fail to see the return on investment anticipated and in worst cases are paying for an application that is not being used to its full potential, if at all.

Based on our experience we don't believe that technology is the only answer to your workforce pain points. We like to peel back the layers to understand where the problems or challenges are stemming from. Quite often we find that it isn't solely a technology problem but not having the right people or training in place. Other times it can be that your processes haven't kept pace with your growing business. What worked in the past isn't working now. In our experience, a combination is required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DISCUSS WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT WITH US PLEASE CONTACT: INFO@MIRUSAUSTRALIA.COM or 1300 738 145

TECHNOLOGY

PEOPLE

MIRUS
AUSTRALIA