Guide

9 Criteria To Evaluate Workforce Intelligence Solutions



Visier®

Most workforce intelligence vendors evaluations begin the same way: a features spreadsheet, vendor demos, and a pricing negotiation. Months later, the organization is live on a new solution and still can't answer the question that started the whole process, which could be anything from "why are our best people leaving us" to "what business impact does opening up an office in a new location have?"

This isn't necessarily a procurement failure, but rather a framing one. The people analytics category is harder to evaluate than most enterprise software because vendors use the same language to describe fundamentally different architectures. And most evaluation processes don't account for that, or the various teams that may use the solution (HR, IT, managers, etc.). Moreover, they optimize for today's problem and aren't considering long-term viability.

What's more, the pace of AI is fundamentally speeding up the time to value for tech stacks, putting increased pressure on PA and IT teams to deliver value quickly.

The organizations getting the most value from the analytics investments right now are mostly the ones that selected a vendor for where they *are going*, not just where they once were.

It's answering questions like: How do I scenario plan if an entire employee demographic ceases to exist in five years? Or, based on current business plans, what skills gaps do my managers need to focus on so we can remain competitive in the market?

If you're an HR tech leader evaluating a new solution, getting the right vantage point for choosing a people analytics solution is critical to business success. The right partner can evolve and change with workforce transformation.



The Workforce Intelligence & People Analytics Vendor Landscape is More Fragmented Than It Looks

The first thing worth understanding is that "people analytics" covers more ground than most buyers expect. The same label gets applied to purpose-built analytics platforms, human capital management (HCM) reporting modules, internal business intelligence (BI) builds, and AI-powered skills tools—architectures that have almost nothing in common and are designed to solve fundamentally different problems.

The more sophisticated platforms move beyond people analytics to workforce intelligence, which surfaces actionable workflows that inform strategic workforce planning, org design, and scenario modeling. That difference in ambition requires a fundamentally different architecture underneath.

Conflating different solution types is where most evaluations go wrong, and it tends to happen early.

The common approach is to compare these on a feature matrix and pick the winner. A better question cuts to the real trade-off: How much of the work of building insight does the vendor's solution do for you, versus how much falls on your team to construct from scratch? The answer to this question should drive everything else.

PRO TIP:

Ask your CTO whether your self-built people analytics solution can deliver "as is" and "as was" metrics on any given point in time without any additional development effort to understand the total time and resources needed to build.

IS IT REALLY A PEOPLE ANALYTICS PLATFORM?

What workforce intelligence and people analytics really need

Purpose-built PA Platforms

Designed from the ground up for workforce data

Contains standardized data models, pre-built HR content

Utilizes benchmarking datasets

HCM-native Analytics

Embedded in HCM systems

Work well within their own systems, but struggle with external data analysis.

Internal Builds

Offers flexibility (at first)

Drains resources during initial build

Ongoing maintenance gets dropped, leading to inefficiencies and inaccuracy

AI Skills Intelligence Vendors

Good for specific use cases only, but can't provide a complete picture of workforce data requirements

9 Criteria to Evaluate People Analytics and Workforce Intelligence Solutions

Criteria	Purpose-built Platform	HCM Native Analytics	Internal Build with BI	AI & Skills Intelligence
Pre-built metrics & definitions	✓	—	✗	✗
Benchmarking against external data	✓	—	✗	✗
Time-aware data modeling	✓	—	—	✗
Pre-built source system connectors	✓	—	✗	—
Cross-systems analysis	✓	✗	✓	✗
Structured data model for AI	✓	—	—	✓
Cell-level security	✓	✗	—	✗
Low ongoing engineering burden	✓	✗	✗	✓
Bi-directional data integration with data platforms	✓	—	N/A	—

✓ Strong — Partial or build dependent ✗ Limited or none

4 Criteria That Actually Differentiate Workforce Intelligence & People Analytics Vendors From the Rest

From our experience, we see specific criteria that get overlooked or underweighted in almost every request for proposal (RFP), and for people analytics and workforce intelligence solutions, they are the ones that arguably matter most.

1. Time-aware data modeling

Workforce data is temporal by nature. Employees change managers mid-quarter, cost centers get restructured, and a platform that can't natively track what was true at any given point in time will produce reports that are technically accurate and operationally misleading.

THE VENDOR ASK:

How do you handle slowly changing dimensions? Can historical data from a legacy system be blended with current data into a single trend line?

WHY IT MATTERS:

It's a basic question, but it's a quick way to separate platforms with genuine time-aware data modeling from ones that just claim it. A vendor that handles this well has built infrastructure to account for this: who someone's manager was last quarter, what cost center they sat in before the reorg, what their job grade was before a promotion. One that hedges or offers a workaround probably hasn't.

2. Pre-built HR content versus the blank slate

There is a real difference between vendors that give you a data warehouse and those who give you answers. Purpose-built platforms come with thousands of pre-calculated metrics and agreed-upon definitions for concepts like voluntary turnover. Generic BI tools arrive empty, which can ultimately lead to wasted time in build and internal misalignment on what the metrics really mean.

THE VENDOR ASK:

"Can you walk me through your metrics library and definitions?" Use this to spot-check against your own definitions and metrics internally to understand the level of customization your organization might require.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Consider this: Before a single dashboard goes live, HR, Finance, and IT have to sit down and agree on what "headcount" means. Does it include contractors? Employees on leave?



3. Data model maturity and AI readiness

We'll call it here: This criterion is the one most likely to determine whether your vendor decision ages well. A standardized, well-structured data model is the prerequisite for any AI capability to work reliably on workforce data. Without it, even a well-designed AI assistant has nothing consistent to reason from.

Again, think of the downstream effects of this. While an answer may seem fine on the surface, if it doesn't take into consideration all of the context within your business, it could lead to a bad decision. As an example, a solution that doesn't understand your organization excludes contractors from the definition of "headcount," which would lead to inaccurate data outputs.

THE VENDOR ASK:

Don't just ask them, "Do you have AI capabilities?" Literally everyone will confidently say yes. That's table stakes now. The real question to ask is how their underlying data model supports AI capabilities.

WHY IT MATTERS:

A general-purpose language model layered on top of inconsistent or incomplete workforce data will produce confident-sounding errors. A domain-grounded AI, built on a model that understands how your organization defines its workforce concepts, is a meaningfully different capability and one that compounds in value as AI tooling matures.

visier

Visier Workforce AI can support you most through our workforce context engine, who's is **purpose-built** to handle constant workforce change by unifying, enriching, governing and delivering accurate workforce context to any tool, AI agent, or human that's asking a workforce-related question.

Book a demo



4. Security model and data democratization

Getting data into the hands of managers and HR business partners, not just the central analytics team, is one of the main things people analytics is supposed to accomplish.

Whether it's achievable without introducing compliance risk comes down to how the platform manages permissions, which is why finding a system that emphasizes data democratization can be key to increasing usage and adoption of a new platform.

Systems that tie access to the formal org chart break down the moment your data needs don't match your hierarchy. Giving a manager visibility into a cross-functional team or dotted-line report often means granting broader permissions than intended, because the system can't be more precise.

Cell-level security fixes this by operating one layer below standard row and column controls, defining permissions down to individual data points. For example, a manager can see a direct report's salary while simultaneously viewing the average salary of that report's peer group without exposing any individual data within that group.

THE VENDOR ASK:

Walk me through your permissioning and role-based access controls. Can you give me some examples of how front-line managers in various departments could access information and interact with the platform?

WHY IT MATTERS:

You want to trust that every individual can only see what they're supposed to see, even when the org chart changes mid-quarter. Building it manually often means delayed updates, security risks, and maintenance of brittle access rules without the granular control of cell-level security.



Internal Build vs. Buy: What's the Real Cost?

When a capable IT team is in the room, the internal build argument will come up. The software is "free." You already own the Power BI licenses and the data warehouse is on Snowflake. Why pay for something you can build?

The license cost comparison happens often, and we'll admit it normally looks good on the surface.

But it's important to note that this comparison never accounts for total cost of ownership. This is often because the actual costs are spread across departments rather than tracked as a single line item, which makes the build look cheaper than it is.

Most evaluations fail to consider what happens post-implementation of a non-purpose-built people analytics and workforce intelligence solution.

An internal build requires a custom integration for every data source, and someone has to fix it every time a source system vendor pushes an API update. Purpose-built platforms ship with pre-built connectors and maintain them as part of the product. For any substantial build, that ongoing burden typically requires at least one dedicated engineering role just to keep the lights on.

Once the internal build is fully built out, that headcount cost tends to exceed the cost of a purpose-built platform well before the two-year mark—and it doesn't even include the actual computing power that data warehouses and data lakes charge for. Because self-built solutions aren't optimized for people data, their data queries are often slower and more expensive to calculate.

Databricks and Snowflake compute charges compound this further. They're variable, hard to forecast, and prone to growing faster than expected as query volume scales.

When you choose a purpose-built platform that integrates seamlessly with your data lake or data warehouse, which is what our partnership with Databricks does, you get the benefit of centralized storage and governance while offloading the build, maintenance, and computing costs.

Benchmarking is key to strategic decision-making

There's another missing piece when you look at an internal build: benchmarking. The reason is simple here. Your data warehouse contains only your data, and building a benchmarking capability as a single company is neither legally nor technically feasible.

Purpose-built platforms like Visier address this by aggregating anonymized data across their customer base—more than 17 million employee records—producing benchmarks from actual transactions rather than surveys.

For organizations trying to make a credible case to the C-suite, that external context is often the difference between a recommendation and a guess.

This discussion deserves time and energy, rather than being a checkbox exercise. Our team has seen internal builds fail over time because of a lack of needed maintenance or ongoing changes. A purpose-built solution like Visier is focused solely on this upkeep to ensure things run smoothly for our users.

FOR HR TECH LEADERS:

Make the Choice for Where You're Going, Not Just Where You Are

Most evaluations start with the same question: What closes our current gap? It's a logical place to start, but it's not the question that determines whether the decision holds up over the coming years.

The better question is whether you're solving for the analytics function you have today or the one your workforce will need next year.

Operational reporting—headcount lists, leave summaries, compliance outputs—doesn't demand the same architecture as scenario planning, org design, and predictive insight.

Choose the wrong architecture now, and the switching cost only grows from here. Choose the right one, and every future capability builds on the same foundation instead of requiring a new vendor and a new evaluation.

Getting that first bet right is worth more than any single feature on a scorecard.

Visier Workforce AI: Powered by our Workforce Context Engine

Visier's Workforce Context Engine powers our platform and products and is what makes Visier Workforce AI possible.

It's purpose-built to handle constant workforce change. It continuously unifies, enriches, governs, and delivers accurate workforce context to any tool, AI agent, or human asking a workforce question.

With Visier Workforce AI's Context Engine, you'll get:



People Data Unification & Management

- Bring all your people data together in one place
- Keeps downstream systems intact when systems change



Workforce Semantic Modeling

- Delivers the same definitions and the same answers to everyone
- Understands how the organization actually works, not just rows in a spreadsheet



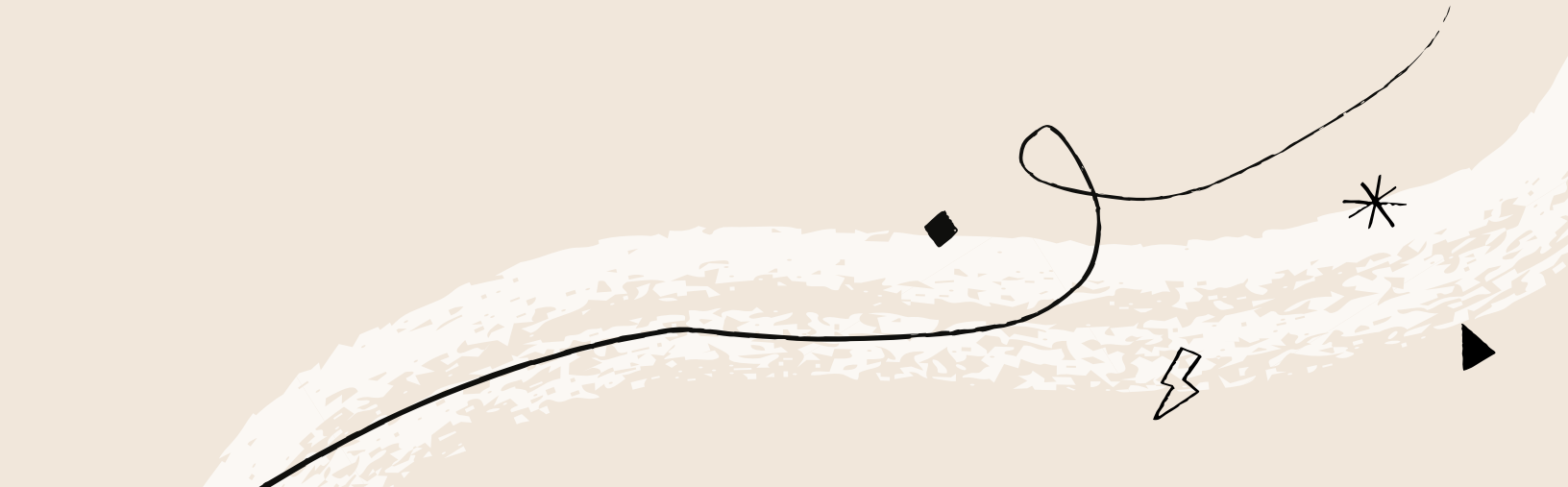
Governed Context Delivery

- Automatically enforces access so people only see what they're authorized to see
- Delivers insights to humans, AI agents, and any connected system

About Visier

Visier Workforce AI is the context foundation for talent management. The Visier Workforce Intelligence Platform turns scattered, sensitive people data into one governed understanding of the entire workforce, so organizations can understand, plan, and activate all of their talent priorities in one place. More than 85,000 of the world's most complex organizations, including Ford Motor Company, eBay, Experian, and Domino's Pizza, rely on Visier's over 16 years of workforce domain expertise, ranked #1 in vendor satisfaction and user experience for three consecutive years by the Sapient Insights HR Systems Survey.

Learn more at Visier visier.com.





visier

visier.com | info@visier.com | 1.888.277.9331

© 2026 Visier Solutions Inc. All rights reserved.
Visier, Visier People, and the Visier logo are the trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Visier, Inc. and Visier Solutions Inc. All other brand names and logos are the trademarks of their respective owners.