



## Driving Scalable HRIS Governance: Establishing Change Management SOPs in Enterprise Workday Environments

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-6641

**Volume:** 04

**Issue:** 06

**Received:** 27-09-2025

**Accepted:** 29-10-2025

**Published:** 28-11-2025

**Page No:** 133-137

### Abstract

The rapid adoption of enterprise Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) such as Workday has fundamentally changed how organizations manage their people, data, and compliance functions. However, without robust governance, even the most advanced systems can lead to fragmented processes, data inconsistency, and compliance exposure. This paper proposes a scalable governance framework centered on structured Change Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) designed specifically for large Workday environments. Using a real-world case study from Summit Behavioral Healthcare—a U.S. healthcare organization with over 5,000 employees—the study demonstrates how formalized governance mechanisms can improve compliance readiness, data quality, and user confidence while reducing ad hoc system modifications by 60%. The findings highlight how HR technology governance is not merely an operational requirement but a strategic capability essential for long-term scalability and digital transformation.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMOR.2025.4.6.133-137>

**Keywords:** HRIS Governance, Workday, Change Management, SOP Framework, Compliance Automation, Digital Transformation, Enterprise HR Technology

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### Introduction

The role of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) has evolved from administrative data repositories to strategic enablers of digital transformation. Platforms such as Workday, SAP SuccessFactors, and Oracle HCM Cloud now underpin global workforce planning, payroll, and analytics functions. Yet, as organizations increasingly rely on these systems, the absence of effective governance structures often undermines their value.

Governance—defined here as the set of policies, roles, responsibilities, and procedures that regulate the design, implementation, and maintenance of HR technology—is critical for ensuring system stability, compliance, and adoption. In large organizations, especially those operating in regulated sectors such as healthcare, finance, and pharmaceuticals, system changes must be managed through standardized, auditable processes. Ad hoc or poorly controlled HRIS modifications can result in data corruption, policy violations, or audit findings that jeopardize organizational credibility and financial integrity.

This paper introduces a scalable HRIS governance framework centered on Change Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), emphasizing practical application within enterprise Workday environments. It draws upon the author's direct leadership of governance implementation at Summit Behavioral Healthcare (Summit BHC)—a fast-growing U.S. healthcare network comprising 44 facilities and approximately 5,100 employees as of 2025.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To define the essential components of scalable HRIS governance in large Workday ecosystems.
  2. To illustrate the operationalization of Change Management SOPs through an enterprise case study.
  3. To demonstrate the quantifiable business impact—specifically compliance improvement, efficiency gains, and risk mitigation—achieved through disciplined governance.
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### 1.1. Background and Problem Context

Organizations frequently underestimate the governance requirements of enterprise HRIS. During implementation, attention is often directed toward data migration, process configuration, and integrations, while governance is treated as a post-go-live administrative activity. As systems evolve—through quarterly Workday releases, mergers and acquisitions, or internal process enhancements—the absence of governance results in a proliferation of change requests, undocumented configurations, and inconsistent testing standards.

A 2024 Gartner survey of HR technology leaders found that nearly 68% of organizations lack a formal HRIS governance framework, despite acknowledging its necessity for sustainable operations <sup>[1]</sup>. Furthermore, in a compliance-intensive environment such as healthcare, uncontrolled configuration changes can violate HIPAA, SOX, or wage-and-hour regulations.

At Summit BHC, rapid expansion between 2020 and 2024 exposed the limitations of an unstructured change management process. System requests were received through email or chat, often without clear ownership or business justification. Testing was inconsistent, and change documentation was incomplete. This fragmentation led to conflicting configurations, delayed deployments, and audit readiness challenges.

### 1.2. The Governance Imperative

Governance serves as the connective tissue between **technology, process, and people**. It establishes accountability and ensures that all system changes—whether functional or technical—are evaluated through standardized criteria. In the context of Workday, governance achieves four primary goals:

1. **Compliance and Risk Management:** Ensures that system modifications align with internal policies and regulatory requirements.
2. **Operational Efficiency:** Reduces redundant efforts and rework by defining clear change-control pathways.
3. **Data Integrity:** Protects master data accuracy across interconnected modules such as Payroll, Time Tracking, and Finance.
4. **Transparency and Communication:** Facilitates informed decision-making among HR, IT, and Compliance stakeholders.

Without governance, even well-designed Workday systems can degrade over time, accumulating “technical debt” and creating dependency on a few individuals for institutional knowledge. By contrast, standardized governance institutionalizes knowledge, making system management replicable and auditable.

### 1.3. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to outline a replicable framework for HRIS governance that organizations can adapt to their own Workday environments. The significance of the study lies in its focus on scalability—the ability to sustain governance across multiple divisions, geographies, and regulatory domains without increasing administrative burden.

The author’s experience at Summit BHC demonstrates that when governance is implemented as an organizational discipline, not merely as an IT control, it drives cultural and

operational maturity. It also fosters collaboration between HR and IT functions, which are often siloed in traditional operating models.

### 1.4. Research Methodology and Approach

This study follows a **qualitative case study methodology** complemented by secondary research from established HR technology frameworks (Gartner, SHRM, Deloitte) and Workday Community best practices. The paper synthesizes organizational observations, process metrics, and governance design documentation developed at Summit BHC between 2022 and 2024.

The governance model was evaluated on three key criteria:

- **Scalability:** The ability to apply uniform change processes across all facilities.
- **Compliance Effectiveness:** Reduction in audit findings or control exceptions.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Improvement in system release cycle time and request turnaround.

To ensure objectivity, governance metrics were benchmarked against pre-implementation baselines collected in 2021 and validated through HRIS audit reports.

### 1.5. Structure of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows:

- **Section 2:** Describes the conceptual framework of scalable HRIS governance, including role definitions, request lifecycle models, and decision-making hierarchies.
- **Section 3:** Presents the case study implementation at Summit BHC, highlighting the design, rollout, and outcomes of Change Management SOPs.
- **Section 4:** Discusses quantitative and qualitative results, including compliance, efficiency, and adoption metrics.
- **Section 5:** Concludes with recommendations and implications for HR technology leaders.

## 2. Conceptual Framework of Scalable HRIS Governance

### 2.1. Overview

A scalable HRIS governance framework must operate at the intersection of policy, process, and platform. It establishes decision authority, risk categorization, and change lifecycle control for all Workday modifications. At its core, the model defines three vertical layers:

1. **Strategic Layer (Governance Board):** Composed of senior HR, IT, Finance, and Compliance leaders responsible for approving system-wide policy changes and prioritizing high-impact initiatives.
2. **Tactical Layer (Change Control Committee):** Reviews all Workday enhancement requests, assesses risk, ensures alignment to organizational policy, and authorizes configuration movement from test to production.
3. **Operational Layer (Functional and Technical Owners):** Executes approved changes, conducts unit and regression testing, maintains documentation, and communicates results to stakeholders.

### 2.2. Governance Roles and Responsibilities

Table 1 summarizes the recommended RACI (Responsible–Accountable–Consulted–Informed) mapping for each

participant in the governance process.

**Table 1:** RACI Matrix for Workday Change Management Governance

Function	Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Workday Configuration Updates	HRIS Analyst	HRIS Manager	IT Applications Lead	Facility HR Leads
Compliance Review	Compliance Officer	Chief HR Officer	HR Manager	Legal Counsel
Change Approval	Change Control Committee	HRIS Director	CFO	Business Unit Heads
Testing and Validation	Functional Owners	HRIS Manager	IT QA Analyst	End Users
Communication and Training	HR Operations Coordinator	HRIS Director	Learning Team	All Managers

This RACI design ensures that accountability is clearly delineated, reducing overlap and ambiguity—two common causes of system drift in Workday environments.

### 2.3 Change Request Lifecycle

Each modification in Workday follows a five-stage lifecycle. Workday Change Lifecycle Stages: Intake → Evaluation → Approval → Testing → Deployment → Review.

1. **Intake:** Users submit requests through a centralized ticketing system with business justification and risk classification (Compliance / Business Need / Enhancement).
2. **Evaluation:** HRIS Analysts validate completeness and assess impact on integrations, security, and reporting.
3. **Approval:** Change Control Committee reviews requests weekly, prioritizing based on risk, compliance, and ROI.
4. **Testing:** All approved changes undergo unit and regression testing in the sandbox environment, followed by peer validation.
5. **Deployment and Review:** Post-deployment validation ensures configuration accuracy and user acceptance; results are logged for audit purposes.

### 2.4 Change Classification and Risk Control

Risk classification is essential for scalability. The governance model employs a three-bucket approach:

- **Tier 1 – Compliance Critical:** Regulatory or audit-sensitive changes (e.g., tax updates, security roles). Require Governance Board approval.
- **Tier 2 – Business Essential:** Operational changes impacting workflows or reports; approved by Change Control Committee.
- **Tier 3 – Enhancement/Optimization:** Low-risk UI improvements or label updates handled by HRIS Manager under documented change control.

This taxonomy provides scalability by allowing low-risk requests to proceed quickly while maintaining rigorous oversight of compliance-critical updates.

### 2.5 Documentation and Audit Trail Standards

Every approved change must produce four standardized artifacts:

1. **Change Request Form:** Captures request metadata and approvals.
2. **Design Document:** Details configuration specifications and expected business outcomes.
3. **Test Log:** Records test scenarios and results.
4. **Deployment Record:** Documents migration steps and post-validation sign-offs.

Automated version control was implemented via SharePoint and ServiceNow integration, providing an immutable audit trail accessible to Compliance and Internal Audit teams.

## 3. Case Study: Implementation at Summit Behavioral Healthcare

### 3.1. Organizational Context

Summit Behavioral Healthcare (Summit BHC) is a national network of behavioral health facilities across the United States. Between 2020 and 2024, Summit BHC expanded from 2,800 to 5,100 employees across 44 hospitals and outpatient centers. This growth necessitated rapid HR process standardization and system scalability. Workday served as the enterprise HRIS for Core HCM, Recruiting, Payroll, and Finance integrations.

Before governance implementation, the HRIS team handled change requests through emails and informal discussions. Average turnaround for configuration changes was 21 days, and audit logs were scattered across multiple spreadsheets. An internal audit in late 2021 flagged the lack of standardized change control as a compliance risk.

### 3.2. Governance Implementation Roadmap

The implementation was executed in three phases over a six-month period.

#### Phase 1 – Assessment and Design (Months 1–2)

- Conducted a governance maturity assessment against Gartner benchmarks.
- Defined scope and key governance roles.
- Developed SOP templates aligned with Workday's biannual release cycle.

#### Phase 2 – Deployment and Training (Months 3–4)

- Implemented a ServiceNow-based intake portal integrated with Workday change requests.
- Conducted training for HRIS analysts, functional leads, and approvers.
- Established weekly Change Control Committee meetings.

#### Phase 3 – Measurement and Optimization (Months 5–6)

- Deployed dashboards in Power BI tracking request volume, cycle time, and SLA compliance.
- Incorporated continuous feedback from stakeholders.
- Embedded audit review mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance.

### 3.3. Quantitative Results

Table 2 summarizes pre- and post-implementation metrics.

**Table 2:** Governance Performance Metrics Before and After SOP Implementation

Metric	Pre-Implementation (2021)	Post-Implementation (2024)	Improvement
Avg. Change Turnaround (days)	21	12	43% faster
Ad hoc Change Requests (% of total)	58%	23%	-60% reduction
Audit Exceptions per Cycle	6	1	-83% reduction
Documentation Completion Rate	42%	98%	+133% increase
Stakeholder Satisfaction Score (1–5)	3.2	4.7	+47% increase

The data demonstrate significant improvements in efficiency and control. Audit teams reported a near-elimination of compliance findings related to system changes.

### 3.4. Qualitative Outcomes

Beyond the quantitative gains, the governance initiative delivered several qualitative benefits:

1. **Cultural Shift toward Accountability:** HR and IT teams developed a shared language around risk and compliance.
2. **Improved Transparency:** Stakeholders had clear visibility into change status and rationale.
3. **Enhanced Partnerships:** Finance and Compliance departments actively participated in decision making, bridging functional silos.
4. **Scalability:** Governance framework replicated for newly acquired facilities without significant administrative overhead.

### 3.5. Lessons Learned

Several lessons emerged from Summit BHC's governance journey:

- **Executive Sponsorship Is Critical:** Securing visible support from the CHRO and CIO accelerated adoption.
- **Start with High-Risk Processes:** Focusing initially on payroll and security changes delivered quick wins and stakeholder confidence.
- **Automate Where Possible:** Integrating governance workflows into ServiceNow eliminated manual tracking and reduced errors.
- **Iterate Continuously:** Quarterly governance reviews ensured that SOPs remained aligned with organizational growth and Workday updates.

### 3.6. Challenges Encountered

Implementation was not without obstacles. Resistance from regional HR teams was initially high, perceiving governance as bureaucratic. To mitigate this, change champions were appointed at each facility to communicate benefits and collect feedback. Additionally, resource constraints limited the frequency of testing cycles; a "change freeze" policy was introduced during critical payroll periods to balance risk and throughput.

### 3.7. Replication and Scalability Potential

The Summit BHC model has since been adopted as a template by peer organizations within the behavioral health sector and can be generalized for other industries. Key elements for successful replication include:

- Documented SOP library linked to organizational policies.
- Defined governance cadence (e.g., weekly committee reviews, quarterly executive briefings).
- Metrics-driven evaluation to demonstrate return on governance investment (ROGI).

## 4. Discussion and Implications

### 4.1. Analysis of Results

The Summit BHC implementation illustrates that governance maturity directly correlates with HRIS stability and compliance performance. Post-implementation data confirmed measurable gains in process efficiency (43 percent faster turnaround) and control effectiveness (83 percent reduction in audit exceptions). These results validate findings by Gartner <sup>[1]</sup> that structured HR technology governance reduces operational risk and enhances employee confidence in digital HR systems. A further insight was that governance fosters organizational learning. Documented SOPs and committee reviews created reusable institutional knowledge. Rather than relying on individual memory or tribal know-how, process intelligence became embedded in documentation and dashboards, making the Workday platform resilient to turnover or role changes. Another dimension of success was cross-functional collaboration. Prior to 2022, HR and IT departments operated in parallel with minimal intersection beyond integration maintenance. After the governance model was formalized, a consistent meeting cadence between HRIS, Finance, and Compliance teams emerged. This collaboration produced faster issue resolution and stronger alignment between regulatory, financial, and human-capital objectives.

### 4.2. Strategic Implications for HR Technology Leaders

The Summit BHC case underscores three strategic imperatives for leaders managing enterprise Workday environments:

1. **Governance as a Strategic Capability** – HR technology governance must be positioned not merely as an operational safeguard but as a strategic asset that protects the integrity of human-capital data and ensures readiness for audits, mergers, and system expansions.
2. **Metrics-Driven Accountability** – Leadership endorsement of performance indicators—such as change-cycle time, documentation completion rate, and user satisfaction—builds an evidence-based case for continued investment in HR technology.
3. **Continuous Improvement and Agility** – Effective governance should evolve with Workday's quarterly releases. Embedding feedback loops, such as post-deployment reviews and quarterly SOP audits, ensures agility without compromising control.

### 4.3. Industry-Wide Impact

Beyond Summit BHC, the governance framework presented in this paper is applicable to any organization undergoing digital HR transformation. In multi-industry benchmarking interviews conducted by the author with Workday community peers in 2024, similar pain points were identified: uncontrolled configuration requests, inconsistent testing, and fragmented ownership. By implementing a comparable three-tier governance model, organizations in manufacturing, life

sciences, and higher education reported improvements in adoption and compliance metrics within six months.

#### 4.4. Limitations and Future Work

While the case achieved significant outcomes, limitations remain. First, the study focused on a single enterprise context; variations in corporate culture or regulatory regime may affect transferability. Second, governance performance data were measured over a 12-month period; longer-term longitudinal data would strengthen statistical validation. Future research could apply quantitative modeling—such as regression analysis—to correlate governance maturity with cost savings or employee experience indicators.

Additionally, the integration of artificial intelligence into HRIS governance holds promise. Predictive analytics could identify high-risk change requests before approval, while machine-learning algorithms could auto-classify requests by impact level. Exploring AI-enabled governance dashboards represents an important frontier for HR technology leaders.

#### 5. Conclusion

The transformation of HRIS from an administrative utility to a strategic enterprise system demands governance that scales with organizational complexity. This paper demonstrated, through both conceptual framework and applied case study, that structured Change Management SOPs are the cornerstone of sustainable Workday operations. By institutionalizing standardized processes—supported by a clear RACI matrix, tiered risk classification, and automated audit trails—Summit Behavioral Healthcare achieved measurable improvements in compliance, efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction. Beyond the immediate efficiency gains, HRIS governance fostered a culture of transparency and continuous improvement. Executives began viewing system changes as strategic decisions rather than routine maintenance tasks. As healthcare organizations continue expanding through acquisitions and digital integration, the lessons from Summit BHC's model highlight the imperative of building governance early, maintaining cross-functional collaboration, and continuously adapting to evolving technology landscapes.

In conclusion, scalable HRIS governance is not optional—it is foundational. It transforms HR technology from a reactive support system into a disciplined, data-driven, and compliant enabler of enterprise agility. Organizations that adopt such frameworks position themselves to harness Workday and other HR platforms for sustained strategic advantage.

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#### How to Cite This Article

Mola R. Driving scalable HRIS governance: establishing change management SOPs in enterprise Workday environments. *Int J Manag Organ Res.* 2025;4(6):133–137. doi:10.54660/IJMOR.2025.4.6.133-137.

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