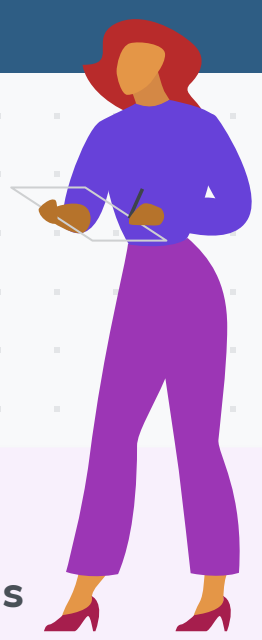
The People Leader's Guide to Strategic Headcount Planning That Scales

Effective headcount planning can drive faster growth, greater innovation, and a better employee experience.

Here are 9 steps you can take as a people leader to get strategic about headcount planning and achieve results like these.



01 Tailor headcount plans to company and department goals

Start with a big picture of the organization's vision based on the company roadmap and overall strategy. Then overlay department goals, considering factors like each department's purpose, stage of growth, and structure. Be sure to check the org chart to evaluate staffing needs and hiring gaps.

02 Understand employee needs

Talking to employees will give you a better understanding of headcount needs. Consider using eNPS surveys to gauge whether employees feel they have enough bandwidth to do their jobs. Questions may include if people have enough capacity to do their jobs successfully or if they feel burnt out.

03 Centralize headcount plan data

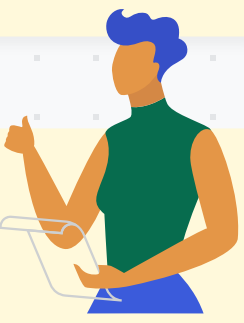
Eighty-nine percent of HR teams use analytics to develop workforce plans. Centralizing this data allows recruiters, finance, HR, and hiring managers to collaborate and understand hiring dependencies. Implementing headcount planning software that allows you to view reporting changes, open roles, staffing budgets, DEI data, and hiring ideas can help.

04 Create headcount planning workflows and processes

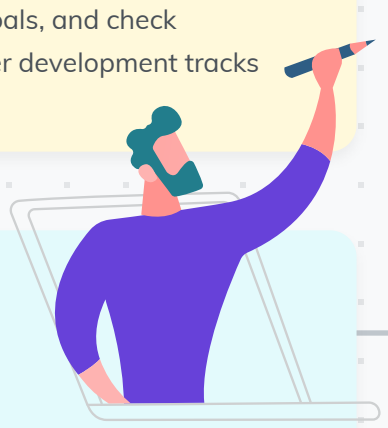
Establishing workflows that create a standard procedure for proposing and approving headcount can simplify planning and speed up the hiring process. For example, you might allow managers to create headcount plans that can be submitted for review and rolled up into the primary plan. Then, finance may get involved to analyze and approve the headcount plan budget.

05 Evaluate the existing workforce

Understanding your current talent force will help identify hiring gaps and career development opportunities based on your growth roadmap. To conduct this type of workforce evaluation, you should identify skills gaps, review demographic data against DEI goals, and check performance data to create career development tracks and map out succession plans.



06 Prepare for the unexpected



Preparing for internal and external risks can help your organization respond to sudden changes — whether that's an economic downturn, increased turnover, or a national crisis. To do so, work across departments to identify potential risks and create alternative staffing plans. Then, consider how your contingency plan will manage the risk and affect your staff.

07 Develop an action plan

After collecting and analyzing headcount data, deliver a concrete strategy to plug skills gaps. To develop this action plan, decide on the mix of external and internal recruitment. Specifically you can upskill and promote internally, hire externally to bring in new skills, or bring in contract workers for short term needs.

08 Share your headcount plan

Once you have a clear headcount plan, share it with current and prospective employees to provide context about the company's growth and their role in future plans. Showbie, an educational app, presents their headcount plan during town hall meetings, which allows staff members to see opportunities for growth and understand hiring choices.

09 Revisit and adjust your plan through growth periods

Your headcount plan will need to evolve alongside your business and the market in which you operate. For instance, your organization's headcount goals may change after a round of fundraising, a new product launch, or global expansion. You should also monitor figures to check the pace of hiring and job openings to set realistic hiring timelines.



> "Having people analytics located in a centralized location where everything is standardized makes sure everyone is planning along the same process and can see how decisions impact the business... It ensures we make the proper workforce decisions down the road."
>
> **- Alyssa Nowicky**
> People Analytics Manager, Even Financial