Workforce Planning

talentedgeweekly

Before You Add Headcount: 12 Questions to Test the Need for Hiring

HOW TO USE IT. Click each box that is true for your organization. The pattern of checkmarks can reveal where you may need to test hiring assumptions, examine the work and available capacity, or consider alternatives before adding permanent headcount.

Demand Signals

Is the business demand behind the hiring request clearly understood and tested?

- [ ] Hiring plans are built on a single growth or demand forecast, with no alternative scenario tested in case that forecast is wrong.
- [ ] Leaders can't clearly explain what business need is actually driving a hiring request.
- [ ] Hiring continues even when leading indicators, such as sales pipeline, utilization, backlog, project starts, customer demand, or budget performance, begin to weaken.
- [ ] Headcount targets are set before anyone tests whether the work could be done differently.

Work and Capacity Signals

Is headcount being used as a shortcut for capacity, without examining the work itself?

- [ ] Adding people is the default answer to a capacity problem, before anyone looks at how the work is actually being done.
- [ ] Teams add people to compensate for inefficient processes, duplicate work, unclear responsibilities, slow decisions, or inadequate systems.
- [ ] Vacancies are routinely backfilled without asking whether the work still exists, has changed, or can be handled differently.
- [ ] Hiring requests are approved one at a time, with no view of how many people are being added across the broader team or function.

Talent-Alternative Signals

Are internal talent, mobility, and flexible options considered before adding headcount?

- [ ] Internal mobility, redeployment, cross-training, and development are considered only after external hiring is underway.
- [ ] Leaders have limited visibility into the skills and capacity already available inside the organization.
- [ ] Permanent hires are used to solve short-term, seasonal, project-based, or highly uncertain work demands.
- [ ] Leaders don't typically compare the cost, speed, and risk of hiring externally with other ways to meet the work demand.