



How to Use Talent Resources More Effectively in a Constrained Environment

By Sarah Jackson

In an environment where organizations face talent and budget constraints, HR leaders must be resourceful and adaptive in meeting talent needs. By using innovative resourcing approaches for critical work, HR leaders can deliver effective solutions in times of uncertainty and constraint.

Many organizations are struggling to acquire the talent they need due to labor market shortages or budget constraints. While the underlying cause of the challenge differs by organization or industry, the result is the same: HR leaders are being asked to do more with less. In an environment of talent and budget constraints, the need to assess and allocate talent resources in line with the speed of business becomes paramount.

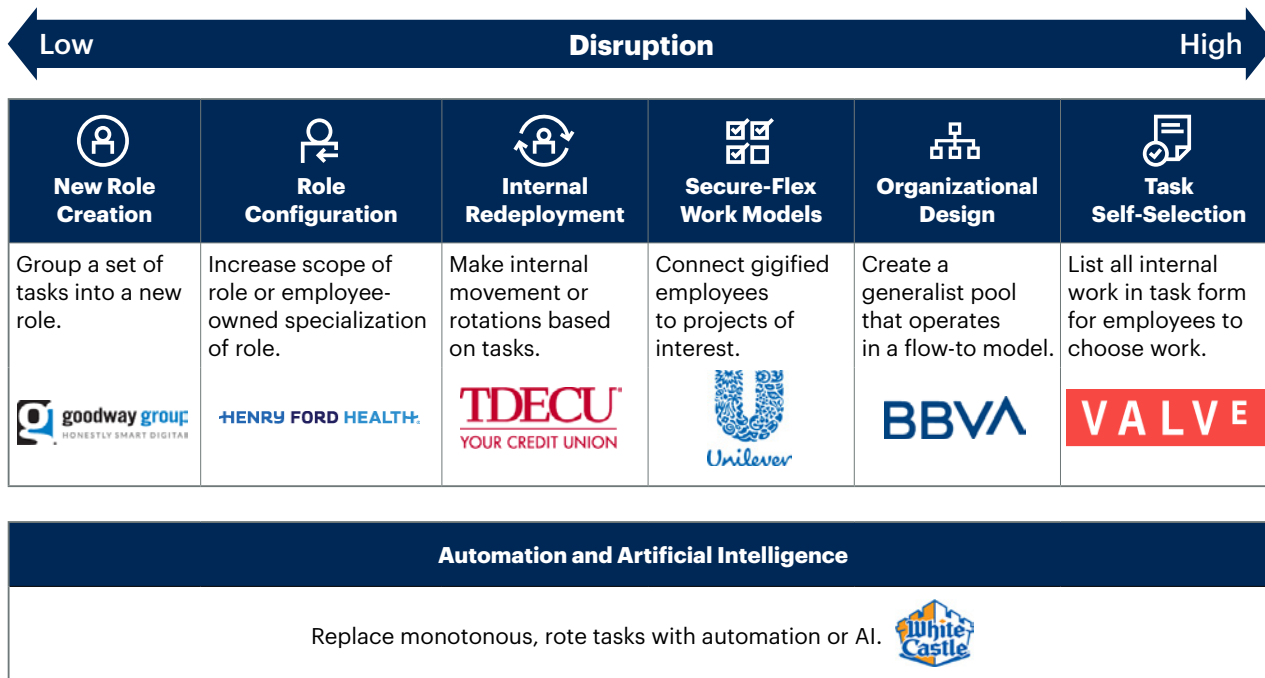
HR leaders need to reinvent the way they address critical work and deliver talent solutions in a more adaptive way. They should start by prioritizing critical roles and deconstructing them into tasks. This process will help them understand current and near-term talent priorities and ensure they are using their limited resources in a targeted way. HR leaders should then focus their efforts on redistributing tasks across the talent ecosystem using dynamic and innovative resourcing strategies.

Meet Critical Talent Needs With Dynamic Resourcing Solutions

Traditionally, organizations have built or bought talent to meet their resourcing needs. In fact, HR leaders have been twice as likely to fill talent gaps through building or buying initiatives compared to any other talent strategy.¹ However, when facing budget constraints, long-term demographic shifts, high turnover and fierce competition for top talent, building or buying initiatives become less viable. Instead, HR leaders need to explore more creative options, moving beyond role-based solutions to resource work tasks in a more fluid and iterative way.



Figure 1: Reallocation of Tasks Beyond Building and Buying Solutions



Source: Gartner

The resourcing solutions organizations engage in fall on a spectrum, ranging from less disruptive (such as new role creation) to more disruptive (such as task self-selection) (see Figure 1).^{2,3,4,5,6} Regardless of the level of disruption, each solution provides more slack in the talent ecosystem, allowing organizations to supply the business with talent inputs and complete critical tasks in resource-constrained environments.

Following are some of the innovative approaches we have seen organizations take to meet talent needs outside the build/buy paradigm. In a changing, uncertain and resource-constrained environment, these strategies benefit employees and employers alike.

Internal Redeployment

Credit union TDECU provides an interesting case for internal redeployment: a resourcing solution that 57% of HR leaders already use.⁷ TDECU experienced temporary areas of excess talent supply and demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retail branches were temporarily

closed, but it needed more employees supporting its mortgage business, which was experiencing high demand. Rather than making layoffs in retail and hiring externally for mortgages, TDECU used internal mobility to transfer employees within the organization. It made these transfers based on tasks to ensure the transferred employees could utilize their existing skill sets in their new positions.

Internal redeployment can be mutually beneficial for the employee and the employer during times of talent and budget constraints. It provides employees with the opportunity to learn new skills, expand their networks and find new meaning in their work. And it allows organizations facing budget constraints to be more cost-effective by mobilizing their current talent to reduce the need to hire new full-time employees. For organizations facing talent constraints, redeployment increases their agility in the face of constant change. They're able to creatively leverage existing knowledge and skills when they are unable to acquire new external talent in a timely manner.

Secure-Flex Work Models

Secure-flex work models provide employees with both the flexibility of gig work and the security of permanent work. An example of a secure-flex work model is Unilever's U-Work concept.³ Through the U-Work model, employees work on varying assignments rather than in a fixed role. They receive a monthly retainer and benefits, and they get paid for each assignment they complete. U-Work employees can design their own work patterns, selecting assignments that range from a few days to a few months long and align to their areas of interest and skill.

In return for the flexible working approach employees get in a secure-flex model, organizations experiencing budget constraints get a more economical way to pay employees for the work they do. Organizations experiencing talent constraints can also use secure-flex approaches to access skilled talent for upcoming tasks and projects more fluidly, tapping into critical talent resources as needed. This concept also enables organizations to expand their talent pools to include workers transitioning to retirement or individuals who only want to work part-time. Using employees who are already familiar with the organization increases speed to productivity and cultural alignment, for which organizations would normally need to account when externally hiring gig or contract workers.

Automation and AI

Finally, organizations are exploring increasingly sophisticated ways to incorporate automation and AI into their talent strategies. White Castle, for example, has been experimenting with using robots to flip burgers in its restaurants. The intention is to alleviate some of the pressure on employees and allow them more time to focus on customers.⁴ By automating this routine, monotonous task, White Castle can create a less stressful, more engaging experience for its frontline workforce.

While automation and AI solutions often require a substantial initial investment, they help organizations facing budget constraints by reducing the longer-term costs of hiring new full-time employees, onboarding, training and time to productivity. For organizations facing talent-constraints, automation and AI lessen the burden

on the existing workforce by removing tasks from its workload, thus reducing the risk of burnout. Automation and AI solutions work well for tasks that are repetitive, have low human centricity and don't provide high levels of employee fulfillment.

Choosing the Right Solution

There is no one-size-fits-all approach here, and different resourcing solutions will suit different organizations. To find the best-fit solution, HR leaders should first assess the tasks within the critical roles at their organizations against core



Table 1: Priorities for Organizations in Each EX-Ready Quadrant

If ...	Keep Task in Slated Role	Create New Role for Tasks	Expand Task Into Other Roles	Use Internal Project Marketplace	Redeploy Internally	Create Specialized Center of Excellence	Apply Secure-File x Work Model	Leverage Contingence Labor	Deploy AI
... portability is high	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
... portability is low	✓	✓						✓	✓
... fulfillment is high	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
... fulfillment is low						✓		✓	✓
... complexity is high	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
... complexity is low		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
... human centricity is high	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
... human centricity is low		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
... interdependence is high	✓								
... interdependence is low		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
... recurrence is high	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
... recurrence is low				✓			✓	✓	
... ease of learning is high			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
... ease of learning is low	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓
... task time is high		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
... task time is low	✓			✓		✓	✓		
... regulation is high	✓	✓				✓			
... regulation is low			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

criteria such as portability, complexity and human centricity. This will allow them to consider which resourcing solutions may be an option for their specific needs (see Table 1).

After identifying possible resourcing options, HR leaders should determine which solutions would be most appropriate and realistic for their organizations using criteria such as cost, time, value, viability and impact on the workforce.

For example, HR leaders may have identified from the task assessment that deploying AI could be an option, but if they are facing time constraints, this may not be the most appropriate solution given the implementation time AI requires. HR leaders should also be thoughtful about the number of solutions they adopt in order to preempt challenges in accountability, talent management and work friction.

Conclusion

When organizations face talent and budget constraints, they must find innovative ways to meet talent needs in a resourceful and

adaptive way and deliver on business priorities without burning out the existing workforce. By deconstructing critical roles into tasks and using innovative resourcing solutions to execute these tasks, HR leaders can ensure critical work gets done in the most effective way, at the speed of business.

¹ 2022 Gartner “Building Workforce Planning Maturity With Targeted Investments” Webinar Poll (18 May). Responses were provided by 89 HR practitioners. Questions included “Do you have a trusted system for evaluating employee skills?” and “Select the talent strategies you use to fill skills gaps.”

² [Workforce Planning in the Age of COVID-19](#), SHRM.

³ [Future Workplace](#), Unilever.

⁴ [White Castle to Hire 100 Robots to Flip Burgers](#), Today.

⁵ [Should Employees Be Allowed to Choose What They Want to Do?](#) INSEAD Knowledge.

⁶ Information on the practices of Goodway Group, TDECU and BBVA was shared with Gartner through interviews with, and documentation provided by, the companies.

⁷ 2023 Gartner “Does Strategic Workforce Planning Still Have a Place in 2023 and Beyond?” Webinar Poll (7 February). This poll was conducted as part of a webinar and includes responses from 101 HR leaders across all regions and all major industries. HR leaders were asked: “Which of the following alternative resourcing strategies does your organization currently use? Select all that apply.”