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How to Build an On-demand Workforce: Key Decisions



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60% participants think 'few people will have stable, long-term employment in the future.'¹

Organizations that adapt their strategies and practices to fit this real-world talent pool, which is far more complex and increasingly composed of non-traditional ways of working, will gain access to skills and experiences³ to accelerate growth, innovation and agility. To tap into this budding yet hidden contingent talent pool, organizations must embrace a skills-first hiring approach⁹.

79% of business leaders say leveraging top-level contractors can yield key competitive advantages²

Challenges in On-demand Workforce Management

A blended workforce may lead to disparate management approaches, directly impacting the organizational strategy, leadership, and culture. This is because the present workforce management systems are not designed to bridge the management gap between internal and external contributors. *In fact, only 16% organizations are very ready to inclusively lead an expanding workforce, including those inside and outside the organization*³

86% of believe that effective management and orchestration of external contributors is now critical to their organization's performance.² But only 33% believe their organization is sufficiently preparing to manage a workforce that will rely more on external contributors⁴

Some workforce planning pointers to manage highly skilled contingent talent:

- Define clear roles & responsibilities between internal and external contributors across business owners, HR, and all other functions.
- Continuously drive and measure the value of this 'fluid' on-demand talent
- Manage the large volumes of contracting & compliance to ensure scalable talent
- Checks and balances to manage data security and privacy
- Devise new and modern models of collective bargaining⁵
- Mitigate competitive risk from possible losses of trade secrets, intellectual property, and organizational knowledge.⁶
- Address labour-related legal and regulatory mandates to prevent penalties and fines.
- Cultivate an enterprise-wide culture of collaboration

First Steps to Kickstart an On-demand Workforce Strategy

Now is the time for business leaders to tap into 'the rise of the pivotal talent'⁶, to leverage people with critical skills. Here is how:

1. **Align with business strategy:** Define your organisations' approach and principles regarding the workforce mix and make a solid business case for the "Why". Analyse your business dynamism, business continuity and business criticality, capabilities and competency gaps, intellectual property rights management, costs and financial impact, etc. from an outside-in perspective. The "Why" can be one immediate need, for example, driving efficiency and turning profitable through a turnkey project by a curated specialist, or making forays into a new market by a seasoned marketing industry veteran. Or it can be a blend of reasons. Assess the impact on the business, for example, hiring a contingent workforce may lead to shorter delivery times on critical projects due to the quick access of the right temporary resources. So how does this talent-dynamic impact your business outcomes?
2. **Define a successful contingent workforce strategy for the overall talent strategy:** Don the talent lens and study the talent demand-supply, benefits of contingency, policies and processes, measures to attract-engage-develop-retain, integration with the larger organization, collaboration and partnering mechanisms, cost-benefit monitoring mechanisms, compliance and regulatory checks, and degree of digitization of HR systems and HR technology etc. Develop a detailed talent management strategy for the contingent workforce, including talent acquisition, performance management, engagement, learning, rewards, and exits.
3. **Decide on the optimum workforce blend:** With the plethora of options in the contingent workforce market, it is important to assess what works best for the business' needs. Decide on the mix of FTE versus contingent, generalists versus on-demand domain experts. Select the right type of contingent workforce based on the business size, stage, strategy. From task-based, time-based, location-based engagements, from consultants to coaches to fractional executives to crowdsourcing, there are different types of contractual arrangements, each with its specific uses.
4. **Set goals and success measures:** A contingent workforce management strategy must be measured and assessed time to time, to ensure it is working well for the business. Clearly define KPIs, collect feedback (both qualitative and quantitative) to assess whether your contingent experts are adding value.
5. **Implement apt processes and technology:** Create standardized, cross-functional business processes, policies, and roles across business units and regions, supported by a single information technology platform⁶. Since much of contingent hiring happens through relationship-building with senior level professionals, a personalized talent acquisition approach will help build a connection. Sometimes, creating such an in-house HRMS may not be feasible, it is then best to outsource the contingent hiring needs to an external specialist for optimizing the process.
6. **Cultivate a conducive culture:** To enable a culture of acceptance and integration, on-role employees must be educated and coached about the what-why-how of a contingent workforce, especially when starting out. Train employees on the new tools and processes, build a collaborative and community mindset, time-and-schedule management for flexi-boundaryless working, enable influencing without hierarchy⁴, and uphold DEI for a contingent workforce. This shall ensure the team spirit and cohesiveness prevails for internal and external contributors.

Here is a *Snapshot* of some recent instances of how SolveCube helped organizations carry out contingent hiring

- Hired a C-suite HR expert for a turn key assignment with a global conglomerate in India. The task was to recommend, design and guide the implementation of the revised strategy for the group.
- Found CISO talent for a consulting firm in Singapore to advise on setting up and maintaining Data and Cyber security.
- Brought in a Fractional CFO for a well-funded startup in Singapore in the healthcare domain, to work towards getting it listed in Nasdaq- Singapore and India.
- Enabled 2- 4 Executive Coaches hiring for a consulting firm in Malaysia to bring in program management — project management experience.
- Enabled 3 Digital Transformation Leaders for a consulting firm in Singapore to mentor and coach the participants of a Government sponsored programme to drive Transformation and Innovation in their respective organisations.
- Helped a manufacturing firm in Australia enhance their sustainability initiatives by bringing on board a Sustainability Advisor.

The talent acquisition strategy must outline the choice of contingent engagement, which in turn depends on the business needs:

- **Task-based:** Project-by-project work is a rising trend for the C-Suite. For example, due diligence for an acquisition, creating a DEI strategy, creating an investor deck for fundraising, or other turnkey projects of strategic significance.
- **Time-based:** Full-time or part-time based on the scope and extent. They can be advisors, coaches, interim managers, or fractional executives.
- **Geo-location based:** Brick-and-mortar companies, especially in traditional sectors may require on-site involvement for a ground-level view of the business. Or maybe geo-location agnostic for new-age businesses.
- **Consultant based:** These can be of various types and may work on any of the above models. For example, a company may contract independent directors on their Board of Directors for 1-2 years, rather than for lifetime. Other types of consultants are:
 - **Coaches and Advisors:** CEO coaching has become prevalent to help founders and CXOs navigate new situations and challenges, through various stages of the company's growth. Coaching is more about showing direction, while advisory may be more functional in nature.
 - **Fractional Executives:** Fractional executives take up regular executives roles, either full-time or part-time. This is usually preferred by smaller companies who may not afford a full-time professional, or till they are able to hire a FTE. Part-time fractional executives may parallelly work with more than one client, and may bring in their own team for operational implementations.
 - **Interim Managers:** In the eventuality of a leadership exit, recruiting the right talent takes time. To fill in the skill and leadership gap on short notice, companies may hire interim independent domain experts. Eventually, if found a good fit and willingness to join, the interim leader may take on the role full-time. This 'try before you buy' model works well for both organization and executive.
- **Crowdsourced based engagement:** Best suited for idea-generation and task-completions in the technology or product space, often referring to niche skills.
- **Contractor engagement:** Labour is 'contracted' out to a company for a finite amount of time listed by a contract, and can be full-time or part-time work. The advantage is that usually such talent can be scaled up and down on demand.

Whatever be the contingent workforce model selected, it is critical to handle the entire contingent talent lifecycle, from talent sourcing to talent engagement, to exit management and possible future re-engagements. This begins with an omni-channel talent acquisition strategy. Some companies may not have the inhouse bandwidth or capability to build such an integrated workforce strategy and may avail the expertise on-demand, of a contingent hiring and management specialist firm or a talent aggregator:

- Better equipped to advise on strategic choices suited to the business and industry
- Global connectedness and reach for talent
- Market know-how about compensation and benefits for this workforce
- AI-powered recommendations help tap talent deeply and widely
- Possess the [right technology](#), structures and procedures for firms to plug-and-play into their talent strategy.
- Knowledge advisory on the softer aspects, for example on how to cultivate a culture which backs the contingent-operating model
- On-demand access to contingent talent basis business ramp-ups and ramp-downs, with options to hire, re-hire, let go
- Minimizes legal and compliance risk due to third-party-deployment model
- Single ownership and accountability to ensure the desired value is created
- Offer protections to contingent talent, such as establishing policies, protocols, community standards, customer support, training and wellbeing opportunities, etc.

Final Thoughts

*In a survey of C-suite executives worldwide, 60% predict that the number of interim experts in their companies will substantially increase within the next three years.*¹⁸

To build a strategic intent and integrated workforce management strategy, one must first seek strong leadership buy-in. This will fuel end-to-end commitment. Companies must invest in integrated cross-functional processes, technologies and align stakeholders across functions and the business to drive ownership and accountability for this blended workforce.¹⁶ Such a tailor-made people strategy will help strike the right balance between control and flexibility, between risk and returns, and eventually make talent work towards surpassing business needs.

We are here to share our experience and expertise in talent discovery.

We would love to hand-hold you & enable a blended workforce strategy curated to your business

Click [here](#) to leave a message or email us @ ClientService@solvecube.com

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Deepak Rajasekar S, Partner & Director — SolveCube, is an experienced HR leader and entrepreneur in the people strategy space. He brings 30+ years of extensive experience across diverse industries and geo-locations such as India, Malaysia, Singapore. His expertise lies in Talent Management, HR Transformation, HR Technology, Strategic HCM,

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1 Workforce of the future report, FWC

**2 Talent on Demand, Odgers*

**3 New fundamentals for a boundaryless world, Deloitte's 2023 Human Capital Trends*

**4 Managing the extended and connected workforce, Deloitte Insights*

**5 Working Without Borders: The Promise and Peril of Online Gig Work, World Bank*

**6 HR functional perspectives: Contingent Workforce*

**7 The Rise of the Fractional CXO: The Gig Economy Goes Executive, Medium*

**8 The Return of the Gig Economy, Russell Pearlman*

**9 The Future of Recruiting 2023, LinkedIn*

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