KORN FERRY

5 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO DATA-DRIVEN WORKFORCE PLANNING

EBOOK

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> -Korn Ferry 2025 CHRO Survey
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Workforce planning has never been more critical or complex. Yet many HR teams are still flying blind, relying on instinct instead of insight.

The result? Top talent slips through the cracks, and key roles are filled too late or with the wrong people.

With skilled talent in short supply and business needs shifting fast, CHROs are under growing pressure to do more than fill roles.

But without the right data, it's nearly impossible to see where gaps are forming or where to invest next. While many CHROs use analytics to help make decisions around retention and talent forecasting, most aren't tapping into its full potential.

In fact, only 18 percent of leaders say their organization consistently uses data analytics to guide people decisions, according to Korn Ferry's 2025 CHRO Survey.

"Data brings precision, visibility, and accountability to your strategic workforce plan," says Korn Ferry's Ashish Sinha. "Without it, your decisions are just based on assumptions."

> This guide shows you how to turn data into action at every stage of the workforce planning process.

> The right approach is always to apply human insight to truly interpret what the data is telling you. We know this leads to far better outcomes than relying purely on supposition or gut feel alone.
>
> -Roger Philby, Korn Ferry

How Data Drives More Effective People Decisions

Data in HR workforce planning goes far beyond tracking headcount or turnover. It includes:

- **Skills**
- **Performance**
- **Engagement**
- **Productivity**
- **Shifts in the external labor market**

Used well, this kind of intelligence helps you truly understand your workforce and plan for what's ahead.

"All effective people decisions start with a hypothesis—questions you need to test. You then gather and analyze data, but it's never about following that data blindly," says Korn Ferry's Roger Philby.

"The right approach is always to apply human insight, to truly interpret what the data is telling you. We know this leads to far better outcomes than relying purely on supposition or gut feel alone."

So why does data matter so much for HR teams trying to get ahead?

Replaces guesswork with insight

Managing skills gaps, succession risks, costs, and market shifts requires precision. Data cuts through complexity and provides a solid foundation for confident, evidence-based decisions.

Reveals what's really going on

When turnover rises or engagement drops, assumptions won't solve the problem. Data helps uncover the root causes, so you can act on facts, not guesswork.

Links hiring needs to business outcomes

Saying you need more people isn't enough. When strategic workforce planning is tied to metrics like revenue per employee or time to productivity, you can clearly demonstrate the impact of every hiring decision.

Builds credibility in the boardroom

Sixty-one percent of CHROs say their CEOs regularly ask for input on major business issues. With the right data, HR leaders can contribute meaningfully, bringing insight on risk, ROI, and workforce strategy to every conversation.

How Data Helped A Biopharma Firm Scale Hiring

The Challenge

A large biopharma company was scaling quickly around the world but didn't have a clear picture of its talent pipeline or hiring risks. Shifting priorities and rapid regional changes slowed down recruitment efforts.

The Solution

Korn Ferry partnered with the company to create a data-led workforce planning and recruitment strategy. Predictive analytics, job profiling, and the Nimble Recruit AI platform gave hiring teams real-time insights into candidate supply and shifting market trends.

The Results

The company rolled out a scalable, phased recruitment model and successfully hired 3,000 people per year worldwide. With better visibility and predictive insights, hiring teams matched talent demand more effectively. They cut time-to-hire, reduced risk, and made faster, more confident decisions.

How Korn Ferry Can Help You

Korn Ferry's data-driven Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) helps HR teams hire smarter and faster—by turning the right data into real results. We're with you at every step. Want to find out what this could look like for your business?

GET IN TOUCH

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> **74% of CHROs say their analytics capabilities are still basic or descriptive.**
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> -Korn Ferry 2025 CHRO Survey
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Smarter Workforce Planning Starts With The Right Insights

Smarter workforce planning isn't about collecting more data. It's about using the right insights to make better decisions before problems land on your desk.

But too often, HR teams are stuck looking in the rearview mirror. They rely on basic, descriptive analytics—like turnover trends or engagement scores—to explain what's already happened.

And they're not alone.

Nearly three-quarters of CHROs admit their analytics are still at this basic level, according to Korn Ferry's 2025 CHRO Survey.

Descriptive analytics are a valuable starting point. It helps you understand the past and spot patterns. But on its own, it won't help you anticipate what's coming, or act in time.

The real value comes when you shift from hindsight to foresight. When you start asking:

⟩ **What's likely to happen next?**

⟩ **And what can we do now to shape that outcome?**

That's the promise of predictive and prescriptive workforce analytics. And it's where workforce planning becomes a true competitive advantage.

How Top Hr Teams Use Data And AI To Stay Ahead

TYPE OF DATA	What it does	What it's used for	How AI supports it	Benefits
DESCRIPTIVE	Explains what has already happened by analyzing historical workforce trends.	Spotting turnover patterns, understanding engagement shifts, diagnosing past issues.	Automates data collection and visualization, enabling faster, clearer reporting without manual effort.	Clear visibility. Evidence-based insights. Stronger reporting.
PREDICTIVE	Uses machine learning to forecast likely future events based on historical patterns.	Flagging employees at risk of leaving, forecasting emerging skills gaps, anticipating leadership shortages.	Employs AI models trained on workforce data to identify patterns and predict risks or opportunities early.	Proactive planning. Early action. Smarter investments.
PRESCRIPTIVE	Recommends specific actions by simulating scenarios and optimizing outcomes.	Prioritizing upskilling investments, identifying best internal candidates, modeling cost impacts of changes.	Applies AI-driven scenario planning and optimization algorithms to guide decision-making and resource allocation.	Faster decisions. Agile responses. Plans that drive business outcomes.

5 Essential Steps To Data-Driven Workforce Planning

You've seen why data matters. Now it's time to put it to work.

These five steps help you turn insight into action and build a workforce plan that can flex with your business.

STEP 1: ASSESS YOUR CURRENT WORKFORCE

Before you can plan for the future, you need a clear picture of where you are today.

"Current state analysis is a critical first step," says Sinha. "You can only move forward once you understand the talent already within your organization."

Start by asking:

- **What roles and skills do we already have?**
- **Where is attrition highest—and why?**
- **How easily can we move people around internally?**
- **Which roles would be toughest to replace?**

To answer these questions, turn to your core workforce data. Headcount reports, org charts, and cost breakdowns help map out how teams are structured and what they're costing the business.

This stage is all about descriptive analytics—using what you already know to create a clear, fact-based snapshot of your workforce.

Talent reviews and skills assessments can uncover hidden strengths or gaps. Tenure and turnover trends reveal where you're stable, and where you might be at risk.

Together, these insights give you a solid starting point. They help you focus your investments and set a baseline to measure how your plan delivers over time.

STEP 2: FORECAST FUTURE DEMAND

Once you understand your current workforce, the next step is to look ahead—what will your organization need to succeed, both now and in the future?

"This isn't just about adding headcount," says Korn Ferry's Michele Capra. "It's about identifying the roles, critical skills, and capabilities that will move your strategy forward. That clarity helps you focus on where to grow and how to adapt."

Ask yourself:

> - **Where in the business will growth or change happen?**
> - **What new capabilities will matter most for future success?**
> - **What external forces could reshape our talent needs?**

You need more than instinct to answer these questions.

Growth plans, automation road maps, and labor market trends help you anticipate where demand is likely to rise. Internal data, such as historic hiring patterns and expected attrition, shows how quickly you can respond and where pressure points may emerge.

Predictive analytics and AI sharpen the picture. Workforce modeling and talent intelligence platforms help you anticipate rising talent needs and identify skills that may be in short supply. They also reveal where gaps could slow progress, giving you time to adjust before issues escalate.

Prescriptive insights take it further. Rather than just showing what might happen, they recommend targeted actions based on what the data reveals—such as hiring earlier to avoid delays or reskilling teams to meet emerging demands.

Scenario planning brings it all together. It allows you to explore different futures and test how your workforce needs might shift in each one, so you can build a plan that's ready for change.

STEP 3: EVALUATE WORKFORCE READINESS

Once you've forecasted what the business will need, the next step is to assess whether your workforce is ready to meet that demand.

This is where data becomes a decision-making tool. It helps you spot risks early and understand how your plan will perform when things change.

Here's how:

A. Forecast where challenges could arise

Get a clearer view of what might slow you down before it does.

- **Predictive analytics highlight potential risks**.
  These tools analyze patterns in turnover, skills gaps, and performance issues to flag areas that could derail your plan—so you can intervene early.

- **Attrition and retirement trends offer a look ahead**.
  Data shows where and when exits are likely, helping you anticipate talent gaps and build continuity plans before they impact delivery.

- **Succession and mobility data reveal weak spots**.
  If key roles lack successors or take too long to fill, the data pinpoints those vulnerabilities, so you can strengthen your pipeline and reduce risk.

B. Surface untapped talent

See what people are truly capable of and where they could go next.

- **Skills inference reveals hidden strengths**.
  By comparing employees' actual capabilities with role requirements and market benchmarks, you can identify overlooked talent and target upskilling where it matters most.

- **AI-powered talent platforms uncover internal potential**.
  These platforms match people to roles across the business, helping you redeploy talent quickly and strategically to meet evolving needs.

C. Test how your plan holds up

Make sure your strategy is built to flex when things change.

- **Scenario models show where plans could break down**.
  Simulate events like a spike in turnover or a leadership gap to see how your plan performs under pressure—and adjust before problems arise.

With this level of insight, you can focus your efforts where they'll have the most impact, whether that's increasing mobility or redesigning roles to meet evolving business needs.

This shift turns workforce planning from reactive to proactive and gives leaders a strategic advantage in how they shape and grow talent.

STEP 4: BUILD TARGETED ACTION PLANS

Now that you've identified the gaps and risks, it's time to act.

The "buy, build, borrow, bot" framework helps you decide whether to hire new talent, grow your team's skills, bring in temporary experts, or automate repetitive tasks. Most plans will need a mix of all four.

Here's how data can guide each approach:

⟩ **Buy when external talent is available and cost-effective**

Labor market analytics, like skills availability and compensation benchmarks, show where external hiring will make the biggest impact. This helps you move faster and focus recruitment where it matters most.

⟩ **Build the skills that fuel your strategy**

Learning and development data highlights where upskilling or reskilling will add the most value. Skills assessments and career path insights help you target those investments more effectively.

⟩ **Borrow talent to stay flexible**

Internal mobility data, succession insights, and AI-driven talent matching tools can identify contingent workers or strategic partners who can quickly fill skills gaps. This keeps you agile, without long-term commitments.

⟩ **Bot the tasks that hold teams back**

Automation studies and workforce planning tools help you spot repetitive work that could be streamlined. Freeing up time means your people can focus on what really drives performance.

Tie every action to measurable outcomes, from time-to-hire to learning ROI, so you can prove what's working and know when to adjust.

By turning insight into clear, targeted actions, you move beyond planning and start building a workforce that's ready for tomorrow.

STEP 5: MONITOR, EVALUATE, AND REVISE

Strategy and workforce planning isn't a one-off task. It's an ongoing cycle of learning and adapting.

Create real-time dashboards and feedback loops to track your progress and catch potential issues early—before they turn into bigger problems.

Keep an eye on key data like:

⟩ **How well your hiring funnel is working—speed, quality, and cost**

This helps you see whether roles are being filled quickly and effectively as business needs evolve.

⟩ **Skills gained versus your development goals**

Use this to assess whether your people are growing in step with your strategic priorities.

⟩ **Attrition rates broken down by role, level, region, and demographics**

These insights help you spot turnover risks that could impact stability or diversity.

⟩ **Employee engagement and retention**

High or low scores here can signal shifts in morale and commitment, both critical to productivity and performance.

⟩ **Progress on diversity, equity, inclusion, and workforce makeup**

This data keeps your talent strategy aligned with your values and helps build a culture that supports innovation.

Keeping these measures front and center lets you pivot quickly when things change—because they always will. As Sinha puts it: "Adoption is critical, but without measurement, you can't manage or improve."

Turning Talent Insights Into Business Impact

Business and technology never stand still—and your workforce plan shouldn't either.

Real-time data and analytics help you spot what's not working and adapt fast, so your teams stay resilient and ready for what's next.

Want to see this in action?

Discover how a <u>major US health network</u> boosted hires by 15.5% and improved retention—turning data-driven insights into measurable results.

Consultants bios

Our experts

ROGER PHILBY
GLOBAL LEAD, PEOPLE STRATEGY
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Advises C-suite leaders across FTSE 100 and
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Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

Business advisors.
Career makers.