

THE STATE OF

Workforce

Planning

2026

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Executive Summary

How do you plan in a state of continuous uncertainty?

Traditional organizational design thinking has relied on looking at historical trends to inform future strategy and building long-term strategic plans. My, how times have changed.

Ever since 2020, economic, political, and social trends have become almost impossible to predict, making strategic workforce planning an exceedingly difficult and even undesirable task.

To better understand how today's people teams are facing this challenge, we surveyed 409 HR leaders in the US who work at organizations with more than 200 employees and who participate in workforce planning exercises. We asked them how they workforce plan, which tools they use, which challenges they face and how they deal with them, and the impact of poor workforce planning.

Some surprising (and not-so-surprising) findings:



There is no consistent timeline for planning.

Organizations planned anywhere from less than one month to 5+ years out, but 78% participated in planning exercises at least on a quarterly basis.



No one likes their current workforce planning tools.

90% of respondents reported at least one issue with their current workforce planning tools, and 84% of respondents are interested in using different workforce planning tools.



Economic uncertainty is more of a challenge when planning than the impact of AI.

46% of respondents said economic uncertainty was a current strategic challenge that impacted workforce planning while only 36% said the impact of AI on org structure was a current strategic challenge.



The most prevalent way of addressing challenges in workforce planning is to get multiple perspectives and data points.

56% of respondents said they address strategic workforce planning challenges by working on future plans with multiple department leaders and 52% of respondents said they analyze both people and position data.



The costs of poor workforce planning are extremely high.

58% of respondents said the cost of poor workforce planning was employee turnover, and 53% said it was missing strategic goals.

How HR Plans Today

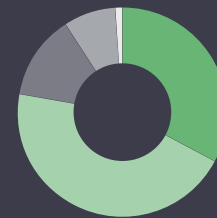
For a practice that happens at almost every organization, there is surprisingly very little public information about how organizations actually workforce plan.

Our survey found HR leaders are planning frequently – **78% of respondents said they plan on an ongoing basis or quarterly.** This enables organizations to be flexible and react to unexpected changes. And, given that business and economic changes happen so rapidly today, most workforce planning experts recommend revisiting strategic plans as often as possible.

However, organizations differ in terms of how far out they make their plans. About half plan less than a year out and the other half are planning more than a year out.

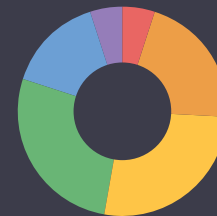
HR Plans Frequently, About One Year in Advance

How often does your organization perform workforce planning exercises?



It's an ongoing effort.....	33%
Quarterly.....	45%
Twice a year.....	13%
Once a year.....	8%
Once every two years or less.....	1%

How far in advance do you plan your workforce needs?



5+ years out.....	5%
2-5 years out.....	21%
1-2 years out.....	27%
6 months - 1 year out.....	27%
3-6 months out.....	15%
Less than 1 month out.....	5%

Broadening the Scope of Planning

Today's planning does not happen in a silo. HR is often partnering with department leaders and executives to make multiple versions, or scenarios, of future plans.

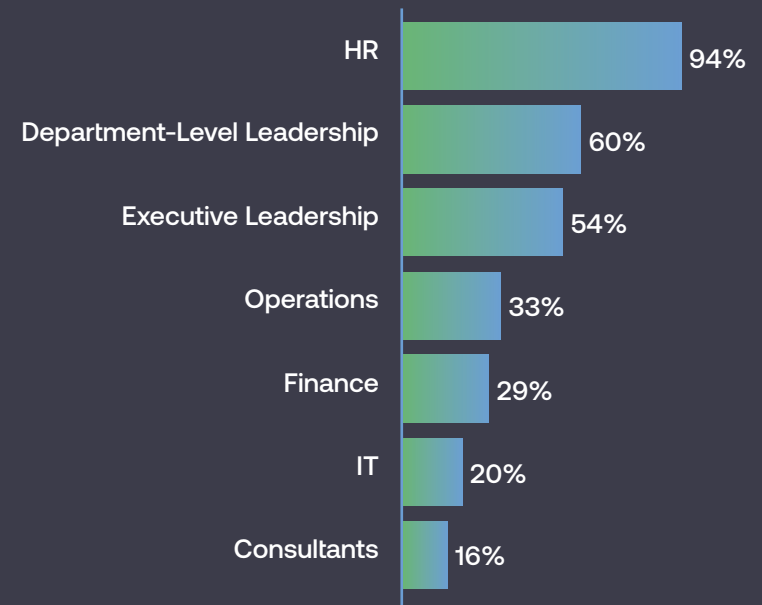
Our survey found that 60% of survey respondents partnered with department-level leaders on workforce planning exercises and 54% partnered with executive leaders.

Interestingly, **at large organizations with above 5,000 employees, finance was involved in planning exercises much more often – 44% of the time – compared to the average of 29% of the time.**

Additionally, gone are the days of one future plan. 94% of respondents said they are building at least two plans, and **48% of respondents said they are building three or more plans.**

Multiple Departments and Scenarios are Involved When Planning

Who is involved with workforce planning exercises?



94% of respondents build at least 2 scenarios when planning

The Fragmented Market of Workforce Planning Tools

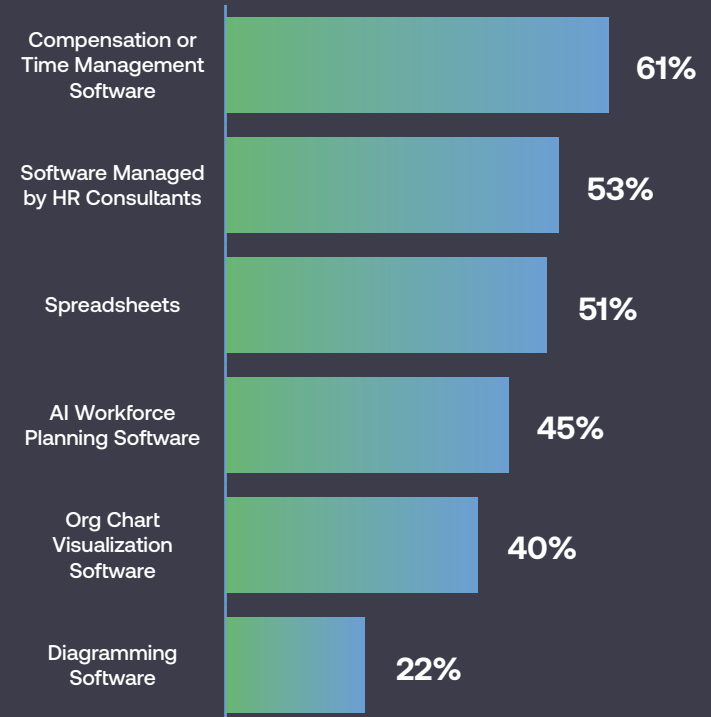
HR leaders most often use compensation or time management software solutions, such as those included in their HRIS/HCM to workforce plan.

However, over 50% of survey respondents also said they either use software managed by HR consultants for their planning exercises, which is bound to be included in costly consultant fees. And, **over 50% of respondents said they use spreadsheets to plan.** Spreadsheets can be problematic when planning because they are not continuously updated with live information– for example, if employees leave your organization, they must be manually removed from spreadsheet plans. Also, they require coding and are not visual tools.

Therefore, it is no wonder that 84% of survey respondents either said they are currently looking for different workforce planning tools or are interested in looking for different workforce planning tools.

HR Wants Better Planning Tools

Tools Used for Workforce Planning



84% of respondents are interested in using different workforce planning tools

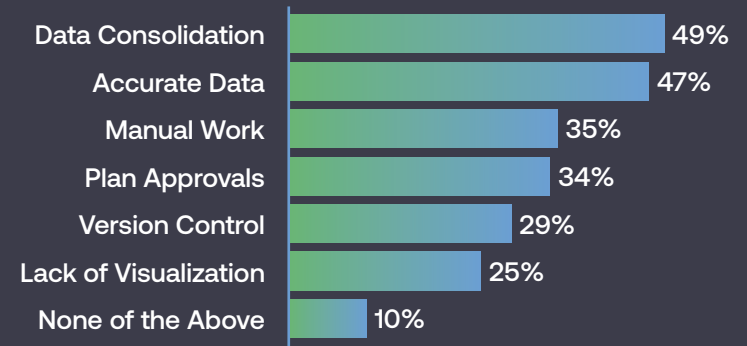
The Challenges with Current Workforce Planning Tools

When asked about what challenges HR leaders face when using planning tools, the most common responses included data– data consolidation of position, employee, and finance data from different sources, and data accuracy and ensuring data is kept up to date. When working with only partial data or outdated data, it is almost impossible to create a strong future plan.

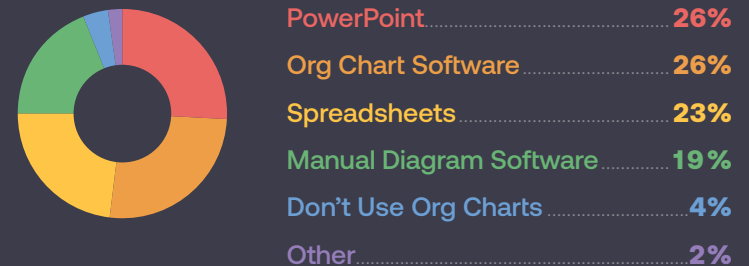
Therefore, it is no surprise that 35% of respondents said they are struggling with manual work when planning, such as manually consolidating data or drawing org charts of their plans. However, **76% of respondents said it is essential to see a representation of their plan in a visual like an org chart.** And, the vast majority of leaders – **68% are using manual tools to create org charts**, which can be incredibly time consuming.

90% of HR Leaders Face Challenges with Workforce Planning Tools

Challenges with Current Workforce Planning Tools



How Org Charts Are Created for Strategic Planning



Planning in a Time of Economic Uncertainty

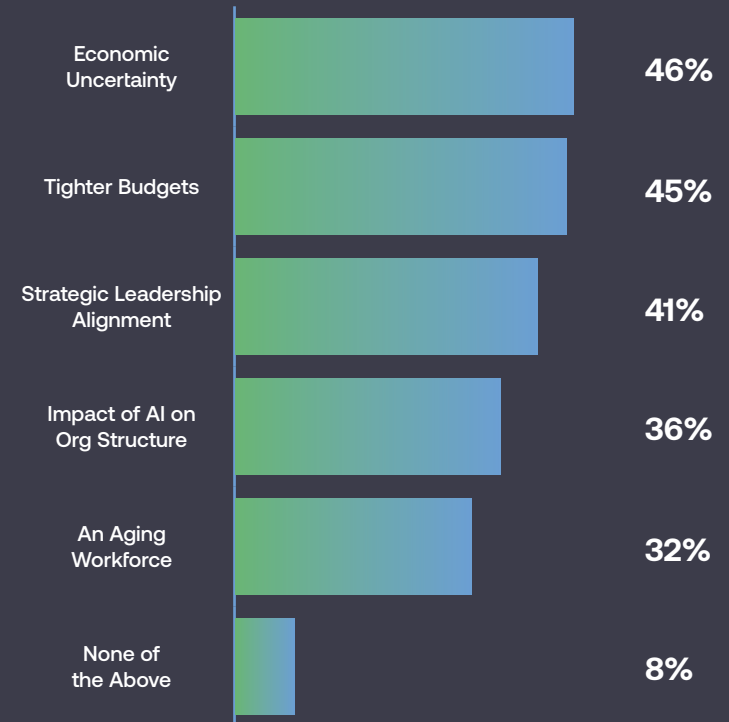
Although the future is always uncertain, multiple economic, political, social and technological factors have upended the speed at which change happens. Because of this, we now live in a state of continuous uncertainty, which makes future planning extremely difficult.

Constant, often unpredictable change coupled with tighter budgets is impacting the planning process of about half of HR leaders.

Interestingly, only **36% are concerned with the impact of AI on organizational structure**, despite significant media attention. This could indicate that many do not believe AI will significantly impact their org structure or they feel confident in their ability to plan an organization that takes advantage of AI tools.

Economic and Budget Concerns Plague Planning Decisions

Strategic Challenges of Workforce Planning



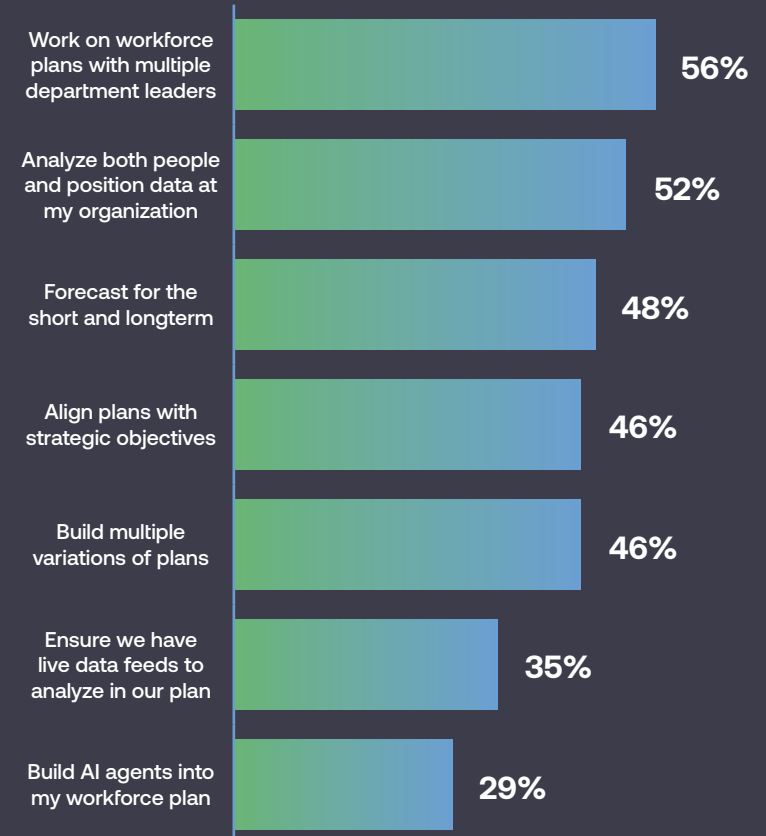
De-Risking the Planning Process

Given the challenges planning for the future, HR leaders are taking extra precaution when preparing future scenarios. In particular, more than half of HR leaders said they are working in coordination with multiple department leaders to collaborate on and get buy-in for their future plans.

Additionally, more than half of HR leaders spend time analyzing both people and position data when planning. Evaluating these data points gives perspective on both individual employees and positions that an organization needs to succeed, however, for many this data consolidation is still a time consuming, manual process. More data points does de-risk planning, but HR still needs better software tools to make this process more seamless.

HR Uses Multiple Tactics to Address Planning Challenges

How Do You Address Strategic Challenges When Planning?

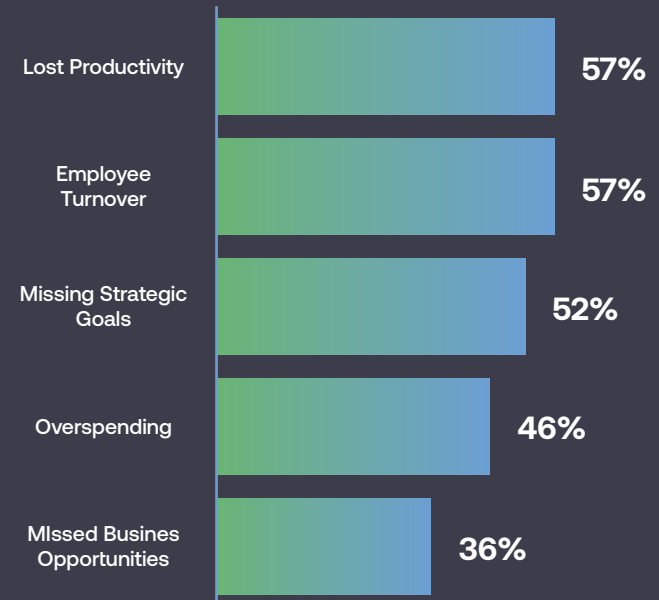


The Impact of Poor Planning

Despite the challenges with workforce planning tools and economic uncertainty, most HR leaders – **84%** – **said they are confident or very confident in their future plans**. This is good news because plans that do not succeed with their goals are incredibly costly.

HR reports the biggest costs of poor planning are lost productivity and employee turnover. These effects not only will have an impact on an organization's bottom line, but the culture, speed of innovation, and ultimately the ability to compete in an increasingly competitive world.

The Cost of Poor Workforce Planning



Key Takeaways

Uncertainty can be scary, especially when the costs of making the wrong strategic choice are high. But to be an HR leader leading workforce planning exercises, you have to embrace the unknown and use what resources you have wisely.

Today, resources are limited for most HR teams. The data clearly shows: Change is moving faster than technology. Most technology solutions HR leaders are using today are not built to consolidate accurate data and streamline workflows. HR teams are spending massive amounts of time manually building plans and drawing future org charts instead of automating these functions. That means less time for strategic thought around scenario planning.

If HR invests in better technology solutions to strategically analyze insights from their workforce and visually build workforce plans, they will inevitably be better prepared for the unknown.

No one can predict the future. However, you can get a better understanding of where your organization's strengths and weaknesses lie today. And the HR leaders that have the ability to keep an eye on those strengths and weaknesses in real time will be the most likely to build scenarios that can accommodate the inevitable disruption of their workforce and steer a path toward success.

“Workforce planning is no longer a siloed thought exercise for executives – it is a strategic imperative in a time when the nature of work is changing faster than most organizations can respond. The organizations that will not only survive, but outperform are the ones that take the time to truly understand what their workforce and the capabilities they need for the future.”



Tom McCarty | OrgChart CEO

Survey Details

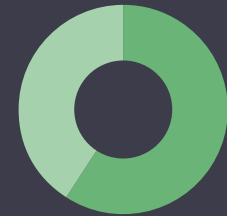
To collect these data points, OrgChart partnered with Centiment. Our survey was conducted February 2026, and included responses from 409 people with titles of HR Manager or higher who responded that they participated in workforce planning exercises. All respondents were in the United States and worked for organizations with more than 200 employees. Respondents came from all industries.

In 2024, there were approximately 221,900 Human Resource Managers in the U.S., according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This gives our survey response 95% confidence with a +/- 5% margin of error.

Level

Manager	46%
Director	42%
C-Level Executive	7%
Vice President	5%

Gender



Female	59%
Male	41%

Organization Size



5,001+	22%
2,501-5,000	19%
1,001-2,500	21%
501-1,000	32%
201-500	6%
Less Than 200	0%

Industry

Healthcare	19%
Manufacturing	16%
Professional Services	16%
Retail	16%
Education	9%
Technology	7%
Other	5%
Financial Services	4%
Government	4%
Nonprofit	3%
Media & Entertainment	1%

About OrgChart

OrgChart is the leading org chart automation and workforce planning solution built for HR professionals.

With direct integrations to more than 50 HR systems, OrgChart enables you to instantly create org charts and strategic workforce plans using employee and position data from multiple real-time sources. Enhance your organizational visibility with an always-accurate org chart and strategically plan for the future with position-based planning capabilities that track KPIs and surface key insights.

Visit theorgchart.com to learn more.

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