A Filled Position Is Not Available Capacity



The vacancy closes in March. Recruitment reports success, the headcount forecast turns green and the department is expected to meet the workload assigned to its now-complete team.

The new employee needs help with unfamiliar cases, systems access is incomplete and a senior colleague is reviewing nearly everything they produce. Work is moving, but the additional person hasn’t yet created the capacity the plan assumes. Some of the team’s most experienced time has shifted into teaching.

For 2027, HR needs to show that interval explicitly. The date an employee starts, the date they can handle a defined workload and the date they can work independently may be months apart. Budgeting a position without budgeting the route to competence leaves operations to absorb the difference, often through delays and unplanned supervision.

This is a planning failure that recruitment speed alone can’t resolve. HR should forecast when useful capability becomes available and what the organization must provide to develop it.

Begin With The Date The Work Needs Someone Ready

A requisition usually records when a manager wants an employee to start. Ask a different question: when must someone be able to perform which work, to what standard and with what supervision?

A September customer launch may require a specialist who can manage exceptions by August, participate in testing in July and begin supervised practice several months earlier. Recruitment has to start before that sequence. An internal transfer may shorten the time needed to learn systems, but the person could still require substantial development in the new role. Their previous department may also lose capacity. Looking only at the destination makes the transfer appear much easier than it is for the organization.

Work backward using the actual stages. Allow for role approval, candidate search,

selection, notice or availability, required checks and access, followed by the learning needed for the work. Some activities can overlap. Others can’t, especially where qualifications, authorized supervision or formal assessment are necessary.

Use a range where the evidence is uncertain. A plan that says independent performance is expected between late June and August tells leadership something useful about its commitments. A precise date unsupported by experience creates confidence the operating team may not share.

Define Competence Through Work People Can Demonstrate

Ready isn’t a useful status unless everyone knows what it means. One manager may use it to describe completion of orientation; another may mean the employee can handle the entire role without support.

Break the role into meaningful work. A customer service employee might first handle straightforward requests, later resolve a defined set of exceptions and eventually manage more complex cases within clear authority limits. A technician might be qualified for one task while still requiring supervision for another. Capture those differences without creating a catalogue so detailed that managers stop maintaining it. The forecast should help allocate work, not produce another administrative burden.

Each stage needs observable evidence: the task performed, the conditions, the standard achieved and the support still required. Record who is competent and authorized to assess it. A course completion can establish that someone received particular instruction; it doesn’t by itself demonstrate reliable performance on the job.

Canadian safety guidance reinforces that distinction. CCOHS describes orientation as part of introducing new workers to workplace-specific requirements. [1] In British Columbia, sections 3.23 to 3.25 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation require specified orientation and training for young or new workers, additional training in defined circumstances and records of the training provided. [2] Those are B.C. requirements, not a complete statement of every Canadian employer’s obligations. The relevant safety, licensing and supervision rules must be built into the local plan.

Give The Hire A Contribution Curve

A new employee can contribute before mastering the full role. The forecast should recognize that contribution while showing what it costs to support.

Use recent internal experience to estimate the stages. How much acceptable work did comparable hires complete during their first months? How much review did they need? Were the cases representative, or were experienced colleagues quietly retaining all the difficult work? Examine the employer’s process as well as the employee’s progress. Missing access, unavailable practice cases and delayed feedback can extend development without indicating any lack of ability.

The following example illustrates a planning method. It doesn’t prescribe a universal learning rate or a productivity target for new employees.

Assume a role provides 120 hours of usable monthly casework capacity once established. That is an operating assumption after allowing for other duties, not a claim about the employee’s paid hours. The newcomer’s contribution is measured in equivalent hours of accepted work, while the coach’s hours represent productive casework capacity diverted into teaching and review. Both must be assessed on a comparable basis to subtract them meaningfully.

Month after start	Accepted output equivalent hours	Coach capacity diverted hours	Net additional team capacity hours
1	30	24	6
2	60	18	42
3	84	12	72
4	102	8	94
5	114	4	110
6	120	2	118
Total	**510**	**68**	**442**

Counting the hire as fully available from the start would put 720 hours into the six-month plan. The example produces 442 net additional hours, a difference of 278. Some ongoing supervision may remain appropriate after month six; independence doesn’t mean the role has no management or quality oversight.

The numbers describe capacity, not payroll savings. They’re also contingent on the coach actually having those 68 hours available and the newcomer receiving the practice needed to progress. If either condition fails, the contribution curve changes.

Include The Cost of the Interval

Suppose the annual loaded employment cost is $96,000. Six months of employment costs $48,000. Add an assumed $10,000 in recruitment and direct learning expenditure and value the coach’s 68 hours at $70 an hour, or $4,760. The defined six-month economic cost is $62,760, comprising $58,000 of employment and direct expenditure plus allocated coaching capacity.

These hypothetical Canadian-dollar amounts aren’t salary benchmarks. They show why the business case must distinguish what it pays from the output it can expect during development. The employee isn’t overpaid because they need to learn; the employer has invested in capability and should plan the investment realistically.

If every hour of the 278-hour planning gap must be covered and equivalent qualified support can be obtained at $130 an hour, the indicative external cost is $36,140. The organization would then face $94,140 of employment, direct and external expenditure across the defined period, plus the $4,760 allocated coaching cost. Verify that the support is genuinely available and doesn’t require further internal supervision that the example omits.

Don’t add the value of all 278 missing hours again as a separate loss after paying to cover the same work. Nor should the employer label the full salary an incremental learning cost when that salary would also have been paid to an established employee. Compare complete alternatives over the same period, with clear treatment of output, spending and internal time.

Often the best response is to recruit earlier, sequence the work differently or reserve a smaller amount of specialist coverage for difficult cases. The calculation should help leaders choose an operating response rather than turn new employees into a cost problem.

Protect The People Who Make Development Possible

The manager who requests three hires may be relying on one senior employee to teach all of them. If that person remains responsible for a full customer load, the plan has already spent the same time twice.

Teaching includes more than scheduled instruction. It involves preparing suitable work, observing decisions, checking outputs and explaining why an apparently reasonable answer is wrong. Review time can also be unpredictable. A difficult case may interrupt the coach's own work at a point when delay has consequences elsewhere. Count the recurring demand and ask which duties will move, who will cover them and how the coach will obtain help.

There isn't one safe maximum number of learners per coach. The appropriate arrangement depends on the work, risk, learner needs and coach competence. A common orientation session may work for several hires together, while supervised practice and assessment still require individual attention. Model those activities separately before assuming a group start produces an economy of scale.

Provide cover for the coach's absence. Otherwise, planned leave, illness or departure can halt development across the team. Clear instructions and approved practice material help, but they don't replace the qualified judgment needed to supervise consequential work.

An Internal Move Has Two Capacity Effects

Internal development is attractive because the employer already knows the person and the person understands the organization. Both can reduce uncertainty, but familiarity with the company isn't competence in every role.

Estimate what transfers and what must be learned. A payroll administrator moving into HR operations may bring valuable systems knowledge while needing development in employee relations boundaries. A successful salesperson moving into management may understand customers while still learning to allocate work and assess performance. Match the assessment to those gaps rather than apply the external-hire schedule automatically.

Then examine the role they leave. If that department needs a replacement, the organization may create another vacancy and another development period. Include any handover overlap and avoid treating the person as fully available in both teams. Where a gradual transfer is sensible, specify the hours, decision authority and date the arrangement ends.

Compare routes on the capability the business needs by the required date. An external specialist may arrive with stronger technical expertise but need longer to learn local systems. A development candidate may take longer to qualify yet provide a useful long-term pathway. The cheapest salary and the shortest time to hire don't settle that choice.

Investigate Stalled Progress Before Changing The Forecast

When an employee isn’t progressing as expected, the tempting response is to extend onboarding quietly or count the position as productive anyway. Neither helps the business understand the gap.

Review actual work with the employee and assessor. Identify whether the difficulty concerns knowledge, practice opportunities, unclear instructions, tools or supervision. Check whether the cases became more complex than those used to build the original estimate. A colleague who has absorbed extra review work may be the first person able to explain why the forecast no longer matches reality.

Appropriate performance management may be necessary, but it should follow evidence and applicable obligations. Consider accommodation needs through the authorized process and avoid using an estimated learning curve as a rigid rule that substitutes for individual assessment. Protect personal information in workforce reports. Executives need to know the capacity and support implications; they generally don’t need confidential details about an employee’s health or circumstances.

Where safe practice requires further supervision, maintain it and revise the operating plan. A budget assumption can’t authorize work the employee isn’t ready or qualified to perform.

Show The Forecast in a Form Operations Can Use

Keep authorized headcount, actual staffing and available capability visible as different measures. A department can meet its headcount budget while several employees are still developing, one person is on leave and a critical task has no backup.

For each constrained role, show the expected start window, contribution stages, coaching requirement and date of the next assessment. Aggregate those stages into the amount of work the team can take on, allowing for existing commitments and ordinary leave. The useful output is a forecast of service capacity over time, with the assumptions and dependencies available for review.

Update it when the evidence changes. An earlier start, a delayed qualification or successful assessment can materially change the plan. Use reasonable ranges and explain the cause rather than give an impression of precision through fractional headcount figures nobody can connect to work.

Avoid league tables of employees’ learning speed. The aim is to plan dependable delivery and provide suitable support. Comparisons become misleading when people receive different assignments, coaching or access to practice, and they can discourage managers from reporting genuine development needs.

2027 Should Cover The Whole Journey

Start with a role the organization must add or replace in 2027. Agree on the work it needs performed, identify when that capability is required and build the timeline

backward. Validate the contribution assumptions with recent hiring experience, then have the manager confirm the coaching capacity and transitional coverage.

Finance should see the recruitment and employment costs alongside the timing of usable output. Operations should know what the new employee can reasonably be assigned at each stage. HR should track whether approval, recruitment and onboarding are on schedule, while the qualified assessor determines readiness for the work. Naming those responsibilities prevents a closed requisition from becoming the only visible milestone.

The decisive date is when the organization can rely on the capability it planned to buy. Until then, a filled position is an investment in progress, and the workforce forecast needs to show the work still required to realize it.