

# Ultimate Workforce Optimization Guide

A Roadmap for Building High-Performing Teams with On-Demand Talent Acquisition



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# Introduction

In an era of workforce uncertainty, economic upheaval, and digital transformation, companies are finding traditional hiring strategies disrupted by the independent workforce. And yet the revolution of using independent experts to solve the most challenging business problems and accelerate growth isn't a new trend.

Even pre-pandemic, McKinsey's July 2019 [Future of Work in America report](#) warned businesses that workforce transformations were on the horizon.

“

Employers will need to manage large-scale workforce transformations that could involve redefining business processes and workforce needs.”

————— MCKINSEY, JULY 2019 FUTURE OF WORK IN AMERICA REPORT

The volume of Americans joining the independent workforce has grown by [22% since 2019](#), and self-employed professionals contribute over \$1.2 trillion to the economy. Experts pivoting to consulting are on the rise — [58% of employees](#) say they're likely to consider self-employment in the future. And in January 2022, [4.3 million Americans decided to quit their jobs](#) — [a 112% increase compared to 2019](#), which at the time was considered the tightest labor market on record.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has undoubtedly played a firm part in accelerating the growth of the independent workforce as more people decided to leave full-time employment. Many pivoted to independent consulting, lured by the promise of autonomous and flexible working schedules, higher wages, and the ability to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations.

With the [labor market tightening](#) and companies having to do more to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, many businesses are adopting alternative workforce models like on-demand talent acquisition. These strategies allow companies to supplement traditional hiring practices while rapidly allocating talent aligned with business and customer needs.

As companies continue to see the value of using independent expertise as a strategic growth lever, it's safe to say that on-demand talent acquisition is the future of work. Growth from the Graphite platform supports this trend, with company spend for onboarding independent subject matter expertise up 170% YoY. So how can you strategically leverage on-demand talent acquisition to build and scale your business, and how do you know if your business is ready?

We tackle these questions and more in this guide, providing you with a roadmap for building a remote workforce and scaling it as you need.



# Workforce Trends Shaping How & Where We Work

## Remote is the new normal (and companies are thriving)

Hybrid and remote work has fast become the norm, and companies of all sizes need to rethink their hiring practices to keep up with the future of work. According to [PwC's 2021 US Remote Work Survey](#), 83% of employers now say the shift to remote work has been successful for their company. Over half of employees surveyed said they want to continue working remotely three or more days per week.

With an ever-changing landscape, it's becoming increasingly difficult for companies to keep on top of hiring trends and onboard the right people at the right time. Yet, innovative businesses are already adhering to this shifting tide and aligning their hiring with more modern-day practices by bringing in independent subject matter experts on demand.

## Job skills evolve and become more disrupted as a new business environment emerges

Ten years ago, positions like chief experience officer, chief data officer, chief people officer, head of diversity and inclusion, and head of growth didn't exist. Roles and responsibilities are changing faster than ever before, and companies need to keep up with this pattern, which is where on-demand talent acquisition can help.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the advancement of job skills meant that [90% of leaders](#) surveyed by HBR and Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in 2020 believed that the ability to hire independent skilled workers using platforms like Graphite would be instrumental in their ability to compete in the future.



## Millennials and Gen-Z are the future of the workforce

Boomers, who represent [a quarter of the American workforce](#), are aging and edging [closer into retirement](#), leaving room for younger generations, namely Millennials and Gen-Z, to take the reins.

These cohorts have exceptionally different needs and priorities regarding the working world. Millennials (now [America's largest cohort](#)) and Gen-Z view work differently from Boomers and emphasize autonomy and control, alongside valuing and prioritizing mental health and flexible working, which is a perfect match for the on-demand workforce.

- Independent consultants joining on-demand talent platforms in 2021 [grew by 39% YoY](#)
- Companies increased their spend on onboarding independent experts on Graphite by [over 170% YoY](#) in 2021

As the on-demand labor market continues to grow and evolve alongside significant changes to the way that businesses operate and work, the future of accessing talent that's central to business strategies lies in the power of on-demand talent acquisition – which is here to stay. Companies need to level up their on-demand talent knowledge and reposition themselves to align with the future of work.

# On-Demand Talent Acquisition 101

The on-demand workforce comprises a melting pot of independent experts who range from generalists to specialists and make up 36% of the American workforce.

Consultants range in skillsets from mergers and acquisitions, corporate strategy, market research, marketing, and technology to subject matter expertise in life sciences, healthcare, financial services, and consumer goods, among others.

Independent experts apply to join on-demand talent platforms, like Graphite, to get paired with businesses of all sizes who need help with specific expertise to fill capability and capacity gaps, accelerate growth, and support internal initiatives.

## Definition

On-demand talent acquisition is a flexible hiring model that provides seamless access to independent subject matter experts tailored to immediate project needs on-demand.

## How does on-demand talent acquisition differ from traditional recruitment methods?



## Are independent experts the same as gig workers or freelancers?

No. The difference between the three cohorts is as follows:

SKILLED INDEPENDENT EXPERT	FREELANCER	GIG WORKER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former MBB/Big Four consultant with extensive professional experience</li> <li>• Highly specialized in their field</li> <li>• Seeks challenging roles that align with their long-term growth aspirations and would help them build new skills quickly</li> <li>• Capacity to take on long-term projects</li> <li>• Signs on for smaller volume of clients, resulting in greater attention to detail</li> <li>• Prefers to be part of a peer network of vetted experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range of experience from out of college to seasoned professional</li> <li>• Typically books weeks in advance, limited immediate access</li> <li>• Works with many clients across many different industries</li> <li>• Either generalized or specialized</li> <li>• Responsible for client acquisition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses online platforms to take on short-term gigs, e.g., Uber, Task Rabbit, Lyft, etc.</li> <li>• Not responsible for client acquisition</li> <li>• Typically, gig workers perform the service for a short space of time</li> <li>• No ability to pre-vet for skill level</li> </ul>

## What does onboarding independent experts on demand look like for a company?

### EXAMPLE

Cindy works as the Director of Market Research at a leading management consulting firm. A east coast based fast-food chain recently awarded them a project to identify new markets for their portfolio. Rather than opening up a new role or pulling consultants from other initiatives for this four-month project, she enlists the help of an on-demand talent platform that pairs her with a data-driven senior market research expert with deep expertise in the restaurant industry. She was able to kick off the project faster by onboarding the perfect expert for the job on demand.

### EXAMPLE

Martin works as the head of engineering at a global online banking firm. He realizes the need for fast deployment, but his team has a backlog in JIRA. Martin engages with a small team of software developers on demand for three months to help clear the backlog and advance his deployment schedule.



Get an inside look at how companies are building high-performing teams with independent subject matter experts.

# 9 Benefits of the Independent Workforce

## 1. Increases access to top-tier talent

On-demand talent platforms play host to a diverse array of highly skilled professionals from across the world. Hiring isn't limited by proximity, giving you the benefit of cherry-picking from pre-vetted, independent subject matter experts that match the skill set you're looking for.

For example, you're about to launch a new product into the market, but you don't know how you should price it. Instead of taking a team member off of another initiative to lead this project, you can onboard an independent expert on demand specializing in pricing strategy with a focus on product launches.

And with the '[Great Resignation](#)' well underway, the volume of candidates in the independent expert pool will continue to grow, meaning an increase in specializations and talent joining the workforce, making it easier to access niche workers and fill projects.

## 2. Addresses capacity and capability gaps

Selecting from the independent expert pool enables companies to close hard-to-fill positions with pre-vetted professionals who are ready to hit the ground running.

For example, an [east coast global consulting firm](#) had an immediate need for a world-class project manager to sift through a vast amount of data, develop and roll out an enterprise risk management (ERM) framework, analyze an extensive data set, synthesize the information, and present key findings to the client.

The consulting firm used Graphite to hire Chris M., a former management consultant with over nine years of experience as a compliance and data strategy leader at companies like S&P Global, Barclays, and Accenture.

This independent expert hit the ground running – reviewing and synthesizing the data to develop the groundwork for the ERM framework. He was able to align effectively with the consulting firm's consulting frameworks while delighting the end client with the end results.

### 3. Accelerates time to market

Businesses often have time-sensitive initiatives but lack the capacity to onboard a full-time employee. By leveraging and quickly accessing independent consultants who are experts in their field, companies can actively reduce the time it takes to bring a project to fruition and accelerate their time to market – which can be incredibly impactful in reaching short and long-term business goals.

#### On-Demand Talent Success Story

Graphite worked with a management consulting firm to help hire a project management consultant to help support and accelerate an upcoming product launch in the pharmaceutical industry. Pre-vetted experts were presented to the professional services team within 48 hours. An independent expert was hired to successfully manage the launch of the new commercial product and create a medical affairs roadmap.

### 4. Enables workforce flexibility

Unlike traditional hiring, on-demand talent acquisition gives organizations flexibility, allowing them to quickly respond to changing business and customer needs as and when they arise. This level of flexibility isn't as feasible with in-house employees having predefined roles and responsibilities, plus a set pathway to advance professionally.

According to [McKinsey](#), companies that can quickly allocate talent to evolving priorities are twice as likely to report stronger performance and deliver better results per dollar spent.

## 5. Enhances productivity

Onboarding independent experts gives businesses an opportunity to outsource highly strategic work, for example, ERP implementations and digital transformations. Businesses win here because they've enlisted the service of a highly skilled professional, meaning that the project will be managed proactively by someone specialized in a specific niche, resulting in quick turnaround times and heightened productivity.

Independent consultants are also happier than their full-time employed counterparts. Most share that they feel more gratification in their work compared to when they were full-time employees. With happiness being a key factor in improving productivity, it's no surprise that onboarding independent consultants can help your team deliver results.

## 6. Powers innovation

Getting an outsider's opinion is a goldmine for driving innovation. A large pool of a company's human capital is often focused on key operational projects, hindering its ability to focus on innovation and negatively impacting future growth. Bringing in an independent expert's fresh outside perspective can strengthen and drive innovation within various departments.

Additionally, consultants have years of experience that can help train your in-house team. And since many are used to wearing many hats, independent experts are more adaptable and appealing for companies looking to solve immediate or long-term problems.

More often than not, due to their extensive experience, consultants bring with them a different perspective and are quick to provide innovative solutions because they may have experienced a similar challenge with a previous company.

Businesses can set their employees for long-term success by onboarding independent experts on demand to give them additional bandwidth to focus on powering innovation.

## 7. Fast-tracks deliverables and meet deadlines

Picture this scenario. In a tight labor market, your short-staffed project teams are overwhelmed. Everyone is working long hours. A solution is to funnel in independent experts on demand that can take on mission-critical projects such as setting a new strategy or delivering an enterprise risk management framework, to ensure that subsequent deadlines and initiatives are hit. This is extremely important for consulting firms working on time-sensitive projects with clients and maintaining a positive working relationship.

## 8. Provides a cost-effective approach to talent acquisition

The time and cost it can take employers to find an independent consultant to take on an intermediate job via traditional staffing and recruiting methods can be time-consuming and costly. By adopting an on-demand talent acquisition model, businesses can save thousands of dollars that otherwise would be used on overhead items such as contracts, retainers, and more which doesn't guarantee results.

### On-Demand Talent Success Story

After 90 years in the diamond industry, maintaining its leadership position in the market was key for this luxury goods company. So they decided to develop their best business case and roadmap for success by hiring a former MBB consultant on Graphite. This independent expert saved the company \$385,000 in costs vs. hiring a full-time employee.

Additionally, on-demand talent acquisition means that you only pay for what you need, unlike traditional staffing agencies where you have to pay an additional fee. Here's a look at the key differences between each.

STAFFING AGENCIES	RECRUITING FIRMS	IN-HOUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talent search is limited by territories. With on-demand talent acquisition, you have access to a global network of skilled independent subject matter experts worldwide.</li> <li>• Typically, you have to sign a contract that is inflexible. With on-demand talent platforms, you only pay for what you need.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The engagement contract is usually long-term for hiring full-time employees, and it doesn't guarantee results.</li> <li>• A new search for talent is always needed with a recruiting firm. With on-demand talent acquisition, you can create a pool of independent experts you can onboard on demand.</li> <li>• Recruiting is aligned to longer-term goals, but is not suitable for immediate, short-term project needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The in-house model is not well-suited for immediate project-based business needs.</li> <li>• This model has multiple steps that must be completed, which can take time to fulfill immediate business needs.</li> <li>• On-demand talent acquisition enables companies to achieve value in high-value projects with immediate resourcing needs. This enables in-house recruiting teams focus on filling roles that have a longer horizon to achieve results.</li> </ul>

## 9. Ensures you're onboarding the right person for the role

As remote work becomes the new normal, there's been a [notable increase](#) in people manipulating the virtual hiring process to land jobs – even if they're underqualified. By using an on-demand talent platform like Graphite, companies get unparalleled access to a pre-vetted roster of independent professionals, meaning who you onboard is who they say they are.

# How to Adopt the On-Demand Talent Acquisition Model

Unlocking the potential of the on-demand workforce isn't rocket science. If you're unsure about where to begin, we've created the **On-Demand Talent Acquisition Maturity Matrix** to help you navigate and understand how you can adopt the on-demand hiring model for your business.

Most companies get started with it as a reactive measure when looking for creative ways to address capacity gaps on their teams. Once businesses see the immediate results, they use on-demand talent acquisition more strategically – scaling their teams with agility.

Before long, multiple departments within the company start joining an on-demand talent platform like Graphite. Eventually, talent acquisition teams take over the process. In doing so, the business is better able to cost-effectively scale teams by quickly and proactively onboarding independent expertise on demand.



	REACTIVE	ORGANIZED	ADOPTED	SCALED
<b>OWNERSHIP</b> Who's leading the process?	Business Unit Lead	Business Unit Lead	Multiple Business Unit Leaders	Talent Acquisition Teams
<b>BUSINESS STATE</b> How is on-demand talent acquisition being deployed?	<b>Reactive</b> On-demand talent acquisition model is inconsistent and unrepeatable	<b>Tactical</b> On-demand talent acquisition model has been proven and used consistently, yet lacks a repeatable process	<b>Tactical</b> On-demand talent acquisition is responsive and aligned with business unit leads' strategic talent needs	<b>Strategic</b> On-demand talent acquisition is fully integrated into the business's overarching talent acquisition strategy and is consistent, scalable, and repeatable
<b>GOVERNANCE</b> How is on-demand talent acquisition being managed?	Lacks processes and policies	Processes are built within the department	Fleshed out policies and processes	Policies and procedures defined and enforced by talent acquisition teams
<b>MEASUREMENT</b> How is success being measured?	No Data	Initial results measured on cost and time saved in talent acquisition	Time and cost savings are identified, enabling the business case for strategic investments in on-demand talent	Speed to market, ability to meet broader business KPIs, and cost and time savings in talent acquisition
<b>COMMUNICATION</b> How frequently are stakeholders meeting?	Sporadic, reacting to talent needs	Proactive, conversations happen regularly around needs within the department	Regularly, yet siloed within specific departments	Regularly around ongoing needs and quarterly around upcoming needs and results



## Reactive

Companies typically start their on-demand talent acquisition journey reactively. A hiring manager has exhausted their options to fill a critical role through standard channels (such as enlisting the support of a staffing agency and tapping their local network for contractors).

While researching alternatives, they learn about the new model of onboarding highly skilled knowledge workers on demand to fill the immediate need. After searching, the hiring manager engages with an on-demand talent platform. Once signed up, it usually takes 13.5 days to find and start a project with an independent expert.

Given the time-sensitive nature of the need, the engagement is tactical in nature. There is no governance structure, no processes in place, and no defined approach to measure the benefits of onboarding an expert on demand. Communication between the hiring manager and the on-demand hiring platform's account team is sporadic and finite.



## Organized

As the hiring manager recognizes the benefits of onboarding independent expertise, they quickly move to a more organized approach.

While the use of on-demand talent acquisition is still quite tactical, the hiring manager starts to implement processes around proactively posting their project-based needs on the platform. They also use their learnings to onboard experts quicker and more seamlessly.

Measuring success is limited, but the communication is ongoing, which opens the door for more strategic use across the company.



## Adopted

As one hiring manager or department onboards multiple independent experts and recognizes the benefits of speed to market and cost savings, success with the on-demand talent acquisition model spreads throughout the organization. Colleagues from other departments are invited to join the platform – kick-starting their on-demand talent acquisition journey.

Now on-demand talent acquisition has become a strategic part of the organization. While its use by hiring managers is still tactical, the model is deployed more proactively within some departments and is better aligned with business/department talent needs. More importantly, this is when we start seeing policies and processes for using this model put in place.

On-demand talent acquisition is fully aligned with the organization's requirements and adheres to best practices. Communication between the company and the on-demand talent platform's account team has evolved to become regular and strategic.



## Scaled

This is the future state all organizations strive for. The on-demand talent acquisition model is used as a strategic growth lever and has been fully implemented across the organization.

In this situation, on-demand talent acquisition moves away from business unit leads and is centralized under the talent acquisition team. The talent acquisition point of contact works with each business unit or department to understand their talent needs in advance and proactively leverages and builds the pool of on-demand workers to address capacity gaps.

Typically, in this scaled approach, the talent acquisition team develops a bench program of independent subject matter experts they can hire on demand – removing the need to vet experts for each new project. These experts can be onboarded to projects as business needs arise.

Since the on-demand talent acquisition model is used more strategically, the organization develops an executive-led policy and procedure to make the use of independent experts on teams a repeatable process. This ensures that the business can obtain similar results each time. Communication is ongoing, proactive, and strategic.

# Taking the Next Step

## Are you ready to build an on-demand workforce?

- Do you have immediate needs that take a long time to fill?
- Are you looking to supplement and add agility and flexibility to your workforce model, hiring processes, and operations?
- Do you have a complex project that needs external support to get over the line?
- Do you need to free up in-house resources for projects coming down the pipeline?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you're ready to implement the on-demand talent acquisition model in your business. Connect with one of our account executives today to learn more and get started.

**LET'S CONNECT**

## About Graphite

Graphite is shaping the future of work by enabling seamless access to the world's best independent talent. It's home to 8,700+ leading independent experts that can enhance various areas of your organization. They're masters in their field, possessing deep functional and/or domain experience. Interested in learning how you can build a pool of high-caliber independent professionals that can help you execute and win more projects? Learn more at [www.graphite.com](http://www.graphite.com).