

**451 Research Market
Insight Report Reprint**

With the launch of its workforce planning tool, Anaplan's application strategy gains steam

March 7, 2025

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The enterprise scenario planning and analysis specialist has about 10 applications in the market today, each targeting specific outcomes across verticals. The new workforce planning app elevates HR's potential as a strategic business partner and sees Anaplan begin to overlap with the people analytics segment of the HR tech stack.

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Introduction

Anaplan has ramped up its human resources and workforce planning efforts with the release of the Operational Workforce Planning Application. One of about 10 applications the company now has in the market, this tool includes more granular position planning capabilities and support of hiring strategy aligned with business and budget strategies. It is also specifically targeted to HR business partners who act as strategic advisers and partners to business leaders in an organization, marking a unique shift in how a corporate performance management specialist like Anaplan views the evolving nature of owners and participants in the planning process.

THE TAKE

While Anaplan's application strategy is still new and untested, the packaging of certain scenario models and insights into an app package seems like a useful and practical way to prove out the company's nonfinancial, adjacent planning aspects while extending participation in the planning process to those outside the chief financial office, who could become more essential to the process. By focusing on position planning, hiring strategy and budget, Anaplan hits at how HR skill sets are evolving more toward talent acquisition, business strategy and data literacy.

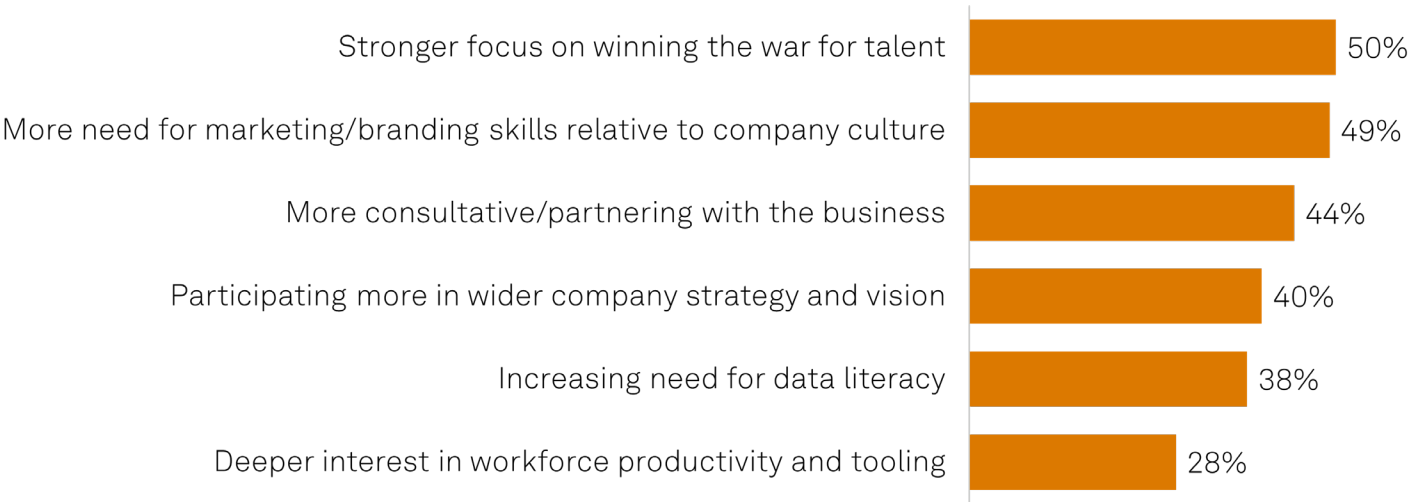
This strategy sets Anaplan up to market to HR pros based on need, and onboard them based on their expanding skill sets. However, the vendor is beginning to overlap with the emerging HR and people analytics space, where competition is increasingly fierce and players are already integrated deeply into existing HR information systems. If Anaplan can differentiate itself and lean on collaboration between HR and finance departments, it could establish itself as a force multiplier for HR's strategic value to the business

Context

Anaplan has long been involved in workforce and headcount planning. In a previous report on the company, we noted that it launched workforce planning way back in 2015. With its latest iteration of these applications, Anaplan is narrowing its span of outcomes and initially focusing specifically on HR as a key stakeholder and user — beyond financial planning and analysis (FP&A) and corporate finance — and centering its value proposition based on HR's needs.

Over the past three years, HR's skills have evolved with a focus on talent acquisition, being a strategic partner to the business, and data literacy (Figure 1), according to our previously cited VotE survey. The Anaplan Operational Workforce Planning Application seems to be built with these skills in mind, supporting the kinds of outputs and outcomes that HR needs in a generative AI world.

Figure 1: Changing HR skill set requirements



Q: How have the skill set requirements for HR professionals changed in your industry over the past three years? Please select all that apply.
Base: All HR respondents (n=248).
Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: Workforce Productivity & Collaboration, Employee Life Cycle & HR 2024.

The vendor’s app launch is also a needed refresh not only to address HR’s evolution, but also to support HR’s evolving stakeholder landscape. As HR looks to be more consultative and partner with the business, company leaders are increasingly concerned about headcount and skills shortages, while remaining cost conscious. According to our Macroeconomic Outlook, Business Trends, Generative AI 2024 survey, headcount and skills shortages are the third-greatest threat to overall sales — ahead of rising interest rates, trade wars and tariffs, energy prices and more.

As business leaders begin to narrow their focus on headcount, HR personnel will be forced to answer for the organization’s talent strategy and be able to quickly scenario model new pathways to growth and productivity. If developed correctly, Anaplan could position this new app and its subsequent apps as the enabling partner HR needs to translate its talent strategy into business value.

Products

Whereas the company’s current headcount expense planning tools take a cost view and target FP&A, the new Operational Workforce Planning Application moves from a macro to a micro view of the workforce and targeting HR and talent acquisition personnel as well as FP&A staff. The application includes position planning and plan-to-hire features, rectifying these efforts to the overall budget and reconciling against recruiting to increase collaboration among HR and finance departments.

The plan-to-hire feature is interesting in that it relies on a deep interplay between Anaplan and the customer’s human capital management system of choice. Once all vacant and filled positions are captured in the application, new positions can be planned for approval and, once approved, pushed to the continuous position plan. Any changes to a position (such as one being filled) are automatically synced and reconciled to the plan to offer visibility into progress against headcount and hiring plans.

In the future, the company intends to develop a strategic workforce planning app that will take a macro view of targeted (or critical) roles with a focus on workforce dynamics and strategic business growth. These applications are complemented by its front-office capacity planning and optimization capabilities for demand-driven and utilization scenarios. All of Anaplan's workforce planning apps also support organization design, talent analytics and diversity, equity and inclusion.

The most valuable strategic capabilities of Anaplan's platform include mapping employees to strategies, initiatives, projects, and technical and relationship skills with the ability to identify future skill shortages and more. Users can model future impact on headcount or operating expenses, or even model the ability of the customer to deliver a project or activity based on a skill or available headcount. Insights are shared in real time for cross-organizational collaboration among HR, finance and operations personnel.

Financials

Before its \$10.7 billion sale to PE firm Thoma Bravo in 2022, Anaplan used to regularly report its revenue. The company's latest numbers before the deal were for its fiscal 2022, when it reported roughly \$592 million in revenue. Anaplan recently announced that it had surpassed \$1 billion in annual recurring revenue.

Competition

This latest application and Anaplan's future plans are beginning to move it into the people analytics segment — the fastest-growing HR tech sector by compound annual growth rate, according to our HR Technology Market Monitor & Forecast. This massively expanding market is a huge opportunity for Anaplan to address HR users and provide value across the organization, but it is highly competitive and driven by niche-specific applications deployed within other HR tech areas.

Companies like Eightfold are pursuing skills-based talent planning, while early GenAI adopter Phenom has been using intelligence to upend talent planning and management alike. Workday Inc. is another looming threat, with its own Skills Cloud and Workday Adaptive Planning blending employee skills modeling with FP&A for unique outcomes. Anaplan has a big opportunity, but it must move carefully and strike hard and fast if it wants to gain mind- and market share as a people analytics and strategic talent planning partner.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Anaplan is taking an operational workforce and headcount planning approach from a foundation of FP&A. The ultimate value of operational planning scenario modeling for employees is to recognize the potential business impacts of talent strategy in financial terms. While HR-centric analytics vendors have to partner with an FP&A provider to translate their insights, Anaplan can natively “translate” the outcomes of these talent plans into terms that the C-suite will understand. This takes the weight off of HR to perform this translation and boosts its ability to speak to the corporate needs that company executives care about.

WEAKNESSES

One of the most talked about areas of workforce and headcount planning is skills planning — specifically, benchmarking skills against competitors and cost to acquire and grow them. Anaplan could move toward the latter with its existing ecosystem if it decides on a native skill taxonomy or utilizes a client taxonomy or index. Beyond this, we believe that, once it increases its skills planning efforts and data, Anaplan could provide anonymized talent and skills benchmarking as a competitive intelligence feature.

OPPORTUNITIES

One of the biggest opportunities for Anaplan in HR and workforce planning is to connect headcount and skills to projects and priorities. The company has alluded to this in some of its messaging, but a more robust and defined approach to its skills identification strategy and integration with work and project management tools could see the company draw a line from strategy to execution — measuring employee skills and headcount as a resource to be applied as needed to accomplish business goals. This also helps connect potential revenue to applied skills or roles, further elevating the financial impact of headcount and workforce planning.

THREATS

The biggest threat to the vendor’s operational workforce planning efforts is Workday, which can combine its Skills Cloud with Adaptive Planning to offer nuanced approaches to skills and headcount planning. Additionally, new startups are popping up every day in the people analytics space, adopting niche approaches to overlaying analytics onto certain HR tech segments to address specific business problems.

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