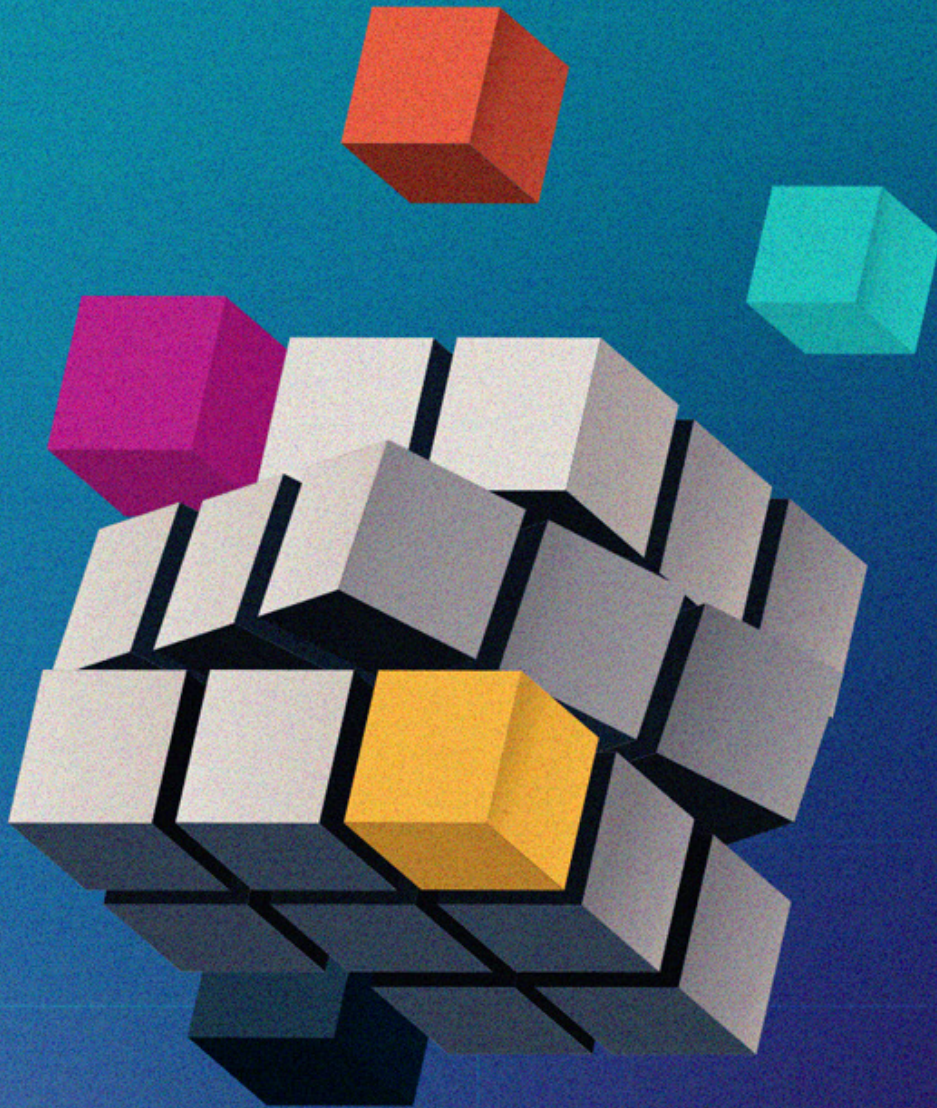


2026

# High-End Independent Talent Report

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The leadership, skills, and flexible capacity companies need  
to deliver in moments of change



# Meeting the moment

In 2026, senior executives face intensifying pressure to deliver growth and transformation—often without the time, capacity, or specialized expertise to execute at speed. To meet this challenge, leading companies are rethinking how critical work gets delivered, pairing core teams with independent talent, interim leaders, and specialized experts to accelerate outcomes, sharpen execution, and reduce risk in moments of significant change.

No longer a niche or stopgap solution, independent talent have become a key lever to help companies deliver their most important work. From AI-enabled transformation and operating model change to turnarounds, integrations, and leadership gaps, organizations are increasingly deploying interim leaders and experts where business needs are urgent, complexity is high, and the cost of delay is real.

This report offers a benchmark for today's executive teams. Across industries and functions, organizations are using high-end independent talent to maintain momentum, bring in scarce capabilities, and deliver critical outcomes alongside their existing leadership and workforce strategies. For some, this has become an increasingly important lever for moving faster and executing with greater precision. For others, it remains an underused source of agility and competitive advantage.

In this annual examination of Heidrick & Struggles proprietary data from North America and Europe, we explore how large and mid-market companies are using independent talent as a core component of workforce strategy to drive growth, lead transformation, and remain competitive in an unpredictable world.



In a world where disruption is the baseline, independent talent are moving to the center of how critical work gets done.

## Sunny Ackerman

Global Managing Partner,  
On-Demand Talent  
Heidrick & Struggles

## Contents

Fast facts	3
The independent talent economy in 2026	4
Key trends: Interim leadership as a strategic lever	7
Key trends: Resourcing for high-stakes change	8
Key trends: Digital and AI as business enablers	9
Trends by industry	11
Trends by function	19

## Fast facts

### **The independent talent economy in 2026**

- Among industries, healthcare and life sciences, consumer markets, and technology and services show the greatest demand, reflecting broad-based need for specialized expertise, speed, and flexibility across sectors.
- Requests from CEOs and presidents have increased 38% YOY as leaders turn to on-demand talent to close execution gaps and keep critical priorities moving.
- The most requested skills span finance, FP&A, project management, and PMO leadership, alongside strategy, technology, and transformation capabilities.
- Demand for human capital expertise jumped 129% YOY, highlighting the growing importance of talent strategy, workforce planning, and organizational change.

### **Interim leadership as a strategic lever**

- Since 2021, demand for interim C-suite leaders has surged 151%—underscoring how flexible leadership has become an established operating model, rather than a stopgap solution.
- Requests for interim C-suite leaders climbed 14% YOY, led by sharp increases in demand for COOs (+250%), CMOs (+100%), CEOs (+24%), and CFOs (+14%).
- Finance remains the anchor of interim leadership demand, with interim CFOs accounting for 51% of all interim leadership requests.
- Requests for interim marketing and sales leaders rose 33% YOY, pointing to a stronger focus on growth and commercial execution.

### **Resourcing for high-stakes change**

- Nearly one-quarter of all engagements are related to a transformation initiative, with demand from PMO and transformation functions up 37% YOY.
- Transaction-related requests grew 54% YOY—and M&A-specific project demand increased 60%—reflecting continued need for flexible expertise in integrations, carve-outs, and other high-stakes deal activity.

### **Digital and AI as business enablers**

- Requests for interim digital, data, and IT leaders have increased 58% since 2023, in parallel with AI's shift from experimentation to enterprise execution.
- One-quarter (25%) of all requests across business functions are related to digital, data, and AI, as these priorities are increasingly embedded across functions rather than confined to technology teams.

# The independent talent economy in 2026

From C-suite leaders and HR executives to strategy teams and private equity sponsors, companies are regularly engaging high-end independent talent to deliver important business outcomes. The rankings that follow show where demand is strongest by industry, sector, and business function, along with the projects and skills most often requested.

On the industry side, healthcare and life sciences remains at the top of the rankings, followed by consumer markets and technology and services. Together, they point to broad-based demand across sectors where specialized expertise, speed, and flexibility remain at a premium.

Human resources again tops our list of business functions seeking support, driven both by its own functional needs as well as its role in helping other parts of the business access talent. This year's data also points to especially strong momentum among CEOs and presidents (+38% YOY), strategy and internal consulting groups (+23% YOY), and PMO and transformation (+37% YOY) functions—as leadership teams turn to flexible expertise to close execution gaps, advance transformation, and support a growing volume of strategic work.

Categories in **teal** moved up in our annual rankings.

## Client industries

1. Healthcare and life sciences
2. **Consumer markets**
3. **Technology and services**
4. Industrial
5. Financial services
6. Private equity
7. Social impact

## Client industry sectors\*

1. Biopharmaceuticals
2. Wealth and asset management
3. Foundations and philanthropy
4. Services
5. Consumer products
6. Retail and direct-to-consumer
7. Healthcare services
8. Hospitality and leisure
9. Insurance
10. Industrial goods and technology

## Client business functions

1. Human resources
2. **CEOs and presidents**
3. **Strategy and internal consulting groups (ICGs)**
4. **Operations**
5. Marketing
6. **PMO and transformation**
7. Finance
8. **Business and corporate development**
9. Digital, data, and IT
10. Innovation and R&D

Based on the industry, sector, and business function of the client seeking talent

\*This is our first annual ranking of client industry sectors.

The project and skill mix offers a read on how companies are deploying high-end independent talent to both run the business with greater discipline and build what comes next. Interim leadership remains the single biggest need, while demand stays strong in core growth and transformation work across marketing, technology, and strategy. At the same time, rising interest in areas tied to people, operations, and deal activity—including significant increases in projects related to human capital (+129% YOY), M&A (+60% YOY), and marketing and sales (+25% YOY)—points to a wider set of change priorities.

The most requested skills lean heavily toward the “run” side of the agenda. Financial controls, accounting, and audit; FP&A; project management; and PMO leadership remain central, underscoring how much importance leadership teams place on clean numbers, tight controls, and reliable execution. Alongside these, demand for strategic planning, growth strategy, technology and systems implementation, process transformation, and post-merger integration shows how companies are using on-demand talent to translate strategy into measurable change across systems, processes, and deals.

Categories in **teal** moved up in our annual rankings.

To learn more about today's top interim leaders and experts, see [“2026 Talent Lens Survey: The State of Interim Talent.”](#)

### Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. **Marketing and sales**
3. Business processes
4. **IT and tech transformation**
5. **Planning**
6. **Growth strategy**
7. Product strategy and launch
8. **Human capital**
9. Business intelligence and analytics
10. **Mergers and acquisitions**

### Most in-demand skills

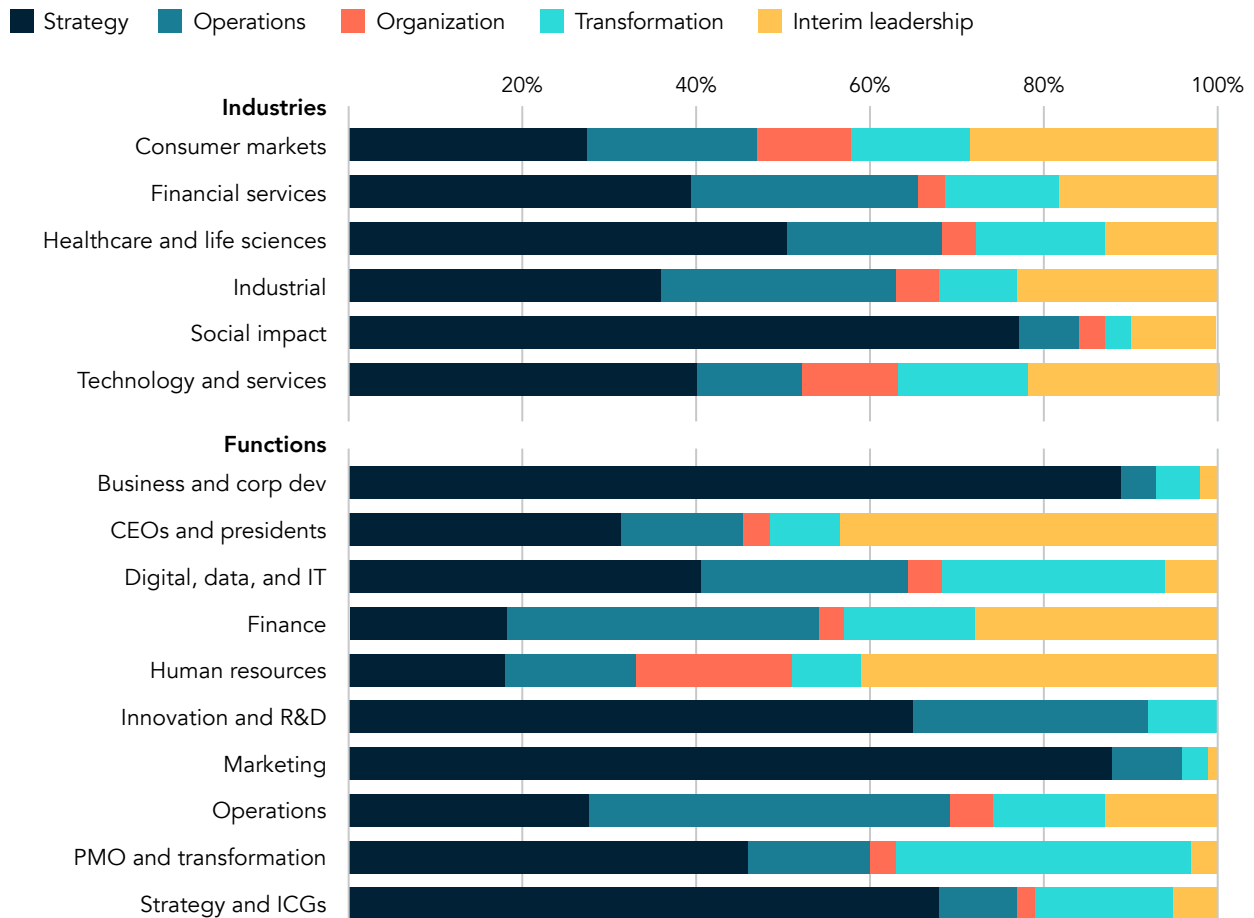
1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Project management
3. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
4. **Strategic planning**
5. **Technology and systems implementation**
6. Organizational design and workforce planning
7. **Growth strategy**
8. **Program management office (PMO)**
9. Process optimization and transformation
10. Post-merger integration

Based on proprietary data from all client requests

### Client function by industry



### Project categories by industry and function



**KEY TRENDS**

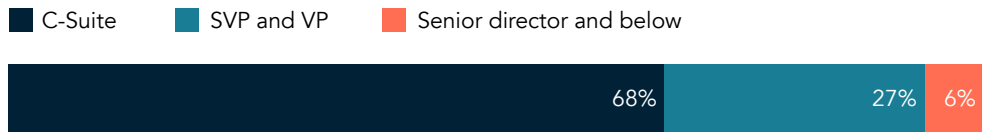
**Interim leadership as a strategic lever**

Demand for interim C-suite leadership continues to rise, with client requests for interim C-suite leaders increasing 151% since 2021. Not simply a stopgap solution, companies now deploy interim leaders strategically to manage disruption, lead complex transformations, and address succession challenges at the top. On a year over year basis, requests for interim CXO officers increased 14%, driven by requests for interim CFOs (+14% YOY), CEOs (+24% YOY), CMOs (+100% YOY), and COOs (+250% YOY).

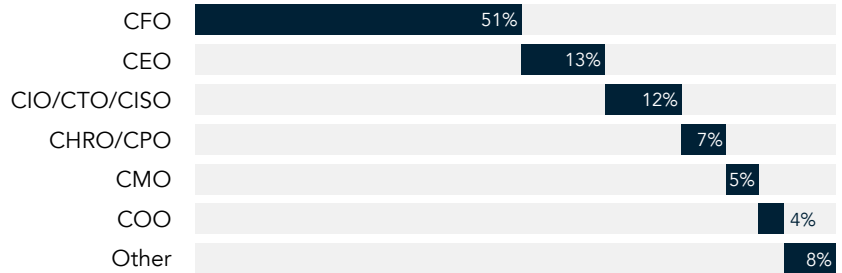
Finance remains the most requested interim leadership function by a wide margin, accounting for 51% of all interim leadership requests and underscoring the central role financial leaders play in periods of uncertainty and change. Demand for interim digital, data, and IT leaders has also increased 58% since 2023—the inflection point when AI moved from experiment to enterprise priority—while requests for interim marketing and sales leaders rose (+33% YOY) as companies seek commercial leadership to sharpen execution and drive growth.

For more on how companies can add interim leadership to their executive pipeline planning, see Todd Taylor and Allen Mueller, “Leadership Assurance: The Role of Interim Leaders in Supporting Companies Through Change and Disruption.”

**Interim levels**

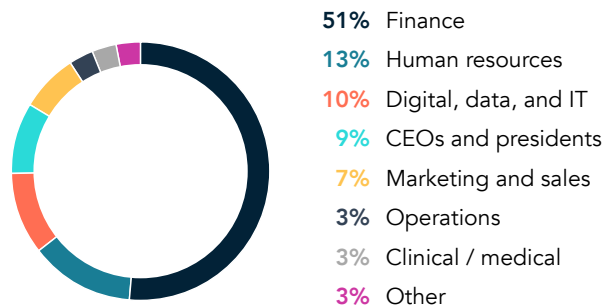


**Interim C-Suite breakdown**



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

**Interim role function (all levels)**



Based on the function of the role the interim leader was requested to fill  
Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

### Sample interim projects

- Interim CFO to strengthen FP&A capabilities and build a scalable finance function
- Interim CHRO to assess HR processes and solutions for a multi-site organization
- Interim CIO/CTO to define technology roadmap for future growth
- Interim Chief of Staff to drive transformation workstreams during corporate separation
- Interim Controller to lead reporting, close process, and complex billings operations

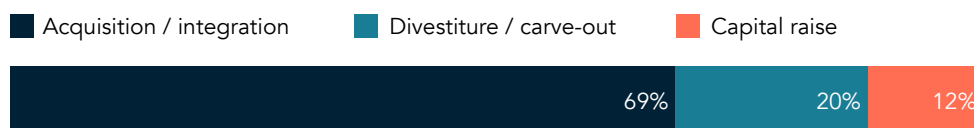
## KEY TRENDS

### Resourcing for high-stakes change

The biggest execution demands today are showing up in moments of significant business change. Across industries, companies are managing transformations and transactions at the same time—reworking systems, operations, teams, and portfolios while facing lean internal capacity and pressure to execute quickly. In this environment, on-demand talent has become an increasingly important source of support in the moments that matter most.

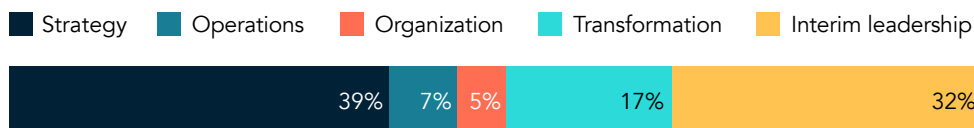
Nearly a quarter of engagements are related to transformations (24%), as demand from PMO and transformation functions rose 37% YOY. Nearly one-fifth relate to transactions (17%), with transaction-related requests increasing 54% YOY. Digital and technology transformation represented the largest share of transformation work, while acquisitions and integrations dominated transaction activity. Together, these patterns point to a more flexible model for delivering significant business change—one built around experienced interim leaders and independent experts who can step in quickly and help keep critical initiatives on track.

### Type of transaction



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

### Transaction project category

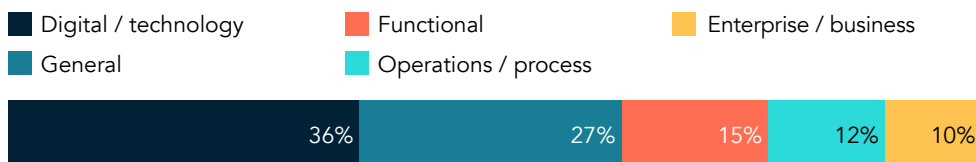


### Most in-demand skills for transactions

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Post-merger integration
3. Due diligence
4. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
5. Divestitures
6. Mergers and acquisitions
7. Capital raising
8. Program management office (PMO)
9. Global human resources
10. Technology and systems implementation



### Type of transformation



### Most in-demand skills for transformation

1. Technology and systems implementation
2. Project management
3. Program management office (PMO)
4. Process optimization and transformation
5. Post-merger integration
6. AI and machine learning
7. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
8. Change management
9. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
10. Organizational transformation

### Sample transaction and transformation projects

- Execute transformation roadmap to accelerate value creation in manufacturing business
- Lead an operating model redesign across processes, data, analytics, and risk
- Stand up program management and governance for a technology transformation
- Lead cross-functional integration and carve-out efforts across multiple active deals
- Provide FP&A modeling to ensure financial visibility through a corporate separation

## KEY TRENDS

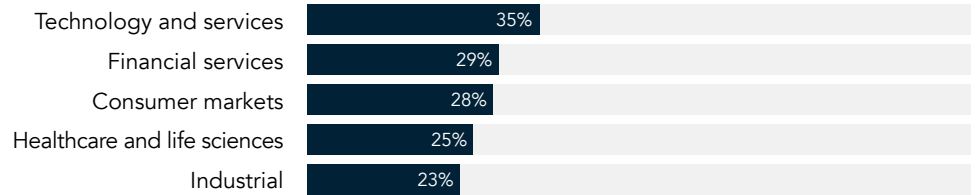
### Digital and AI as business enablers

Digital and AI emerge in this year's data as a significant cross-functional area of demand. These capabilities touch a quarter of all requests (25%)—frequently appearing in initiatives led by strategy, PMO and transformation, finance, and other teams without formal technology ownership. That pattern reflects a broader reality where digital and AI are increasingly being embedded as core business enablers for growth, transformation, and operational improvement.

Many of these initiatives go well beyond point solutions or early experimentation. Recent digital and AI-related work often involves multi-workstream programs that require leaders who can shape the operating model, guide implementation, and drive adoption across teams. The skills in highest demand reflect those needs, with particular emphasis on technology implementation and AI, but the demand isn't just for technical specialists. The most valuable digital and data leaders are business-minded operators who can bridge technology and business execution to connect new capabilities to measurable outcomes.

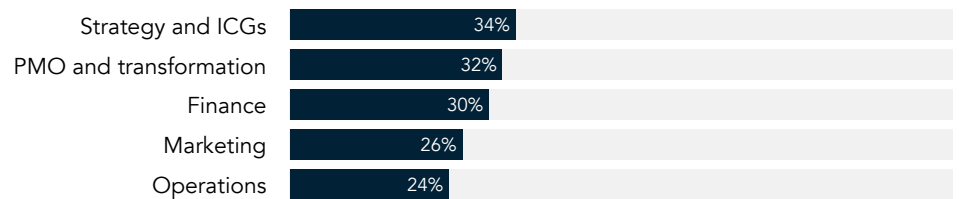
### Top industries for digital, data, and AI projects

Percent of total project requests related to digital, data, and AI within the industry



### Top non-tech business functions for digital, data, and AI projects

Percent of total project requests related to digital, data, and AI within the function



### Most in-demand skills for digital, data, and AI projects

1. Technology and systems implementation
2. AI and machine learning
3. Project management
4. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
5. Process optimization and transformation
6. Database architecture and data management
7. Growth strategy
8. Digital marketing
9. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
10. Sourcing and procurement

### Sample digital, data, and AI projects

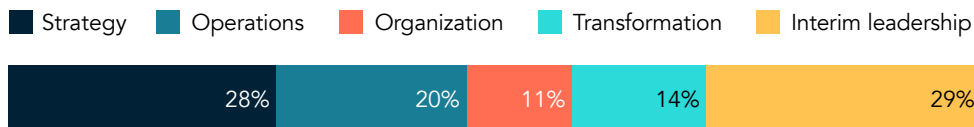
- Develop AI business strategy to drive efficiency and operational performance
- Build a competitive intelligence database to support R&D decision-making
- Interim CISO to steer global cybersecurity, data privacy, and ethical AI implementation
- Build AI strategy and learning modules for education partners
- Lead Workday Financials implementation to enable scalable finance operations

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Consumer markets

In consumer markets, the push for growth is inseparable from the need to protect margins and operate with greater discipline. Companies are turning to independent talent across strategic, operational, and leadership needs—bringing in outside perspective and hands-on capability to guide priorities, accelerate action, and steady performance through change.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Marketing and sales
3. Business processes
4. Human capital
5. IT and tech transformation

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
3. Growth strategy
4. B2C marketing
5. Project management

## Sample projects

- Scale a specialty marketplace through new features for sellers and consumers
- Interim CMO to lead holiday marketing and stabilize the function during a search
- Lead financial reporting across two businesses within a newly merged company
- Interim IT leader to shape ERP transformation for manufacturing and supply chain
- Model tariff scenarios to guide pricing, cost, and strategy decisions



Execution gaps show up quickly for consumer companies in transformation—in cost and margin bases, in the supply network, and in the ever-evolving consumer experience. The advantage goes to those who know when to bring in targeted expertise to keep priorities moving.

### Amanda Worthington

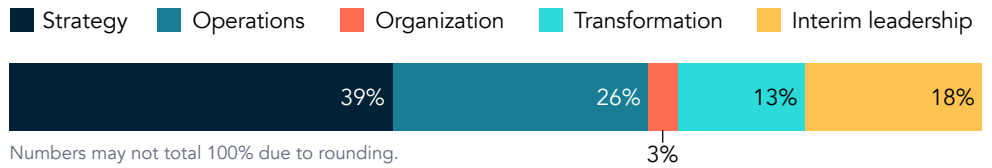
Global Managing Partner, Consumer Markets  
Heidrick & Struggles

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Financial services

Financial services leaders are navigating a market defined by regulatory complexity, cost pressure, and ongoing modernization. Firms are tapping independent talent to help steer transformation and move priority initiatives forward—particularly when strategic judgment and disciplined execution must go hand in hand.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Business processes
2. Interim leadership
3. IT and tech transformation
4. Marketing and sales
5. Product strategy and launch

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Due diligence
3. Program management office (PMO)
4. Technology and systems implementation
5. Process optimization and transformation

## Sample projects

- Interim CFO to lead finance and strengthen controls for an investment fund
- Lead an operating model redesign across processes, data, analytics, and risk
- Interim CHRO to lead people strategy, talent development, and culture
- Strengthen enterprise risk framework ahead of increased regulatory requirements
- Stand up program management and governance for a technology transformation



The complexity in financial services today is not just regulatory. It's operational, technological, and organizational. Targeted outside expertise can be a very effective way to add judgment, capacity, and momentum around important initiatives.

### Dominique Fortier

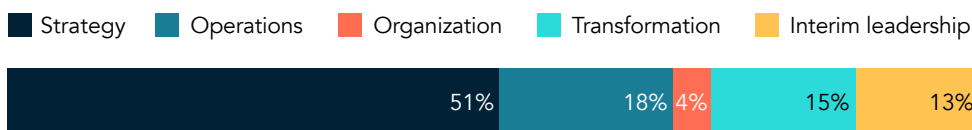
Global Managing Partner, Financial Services  
Heidrick & Struggles

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Healthcare and life sciences

Across healthcare and life sciences, leaders are working to improve performance amid regulatory, operational, and commercial complexity. Demand for independent talent is strongest where specialized expertise can accelerate high-stakes work—from product launches and clinical operations to data platforms and commercial strategy—in a tightly constrained environment.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. Marketing and sales
2. Interim leadership
3. Business processes
4. Product strategy and launch
5. Innovation and R&D (tie)  
IT and tech transformation (tie)

## Most in-demand skills

1. Project management
2. Market access and value
3. Clinical operations
4. Product launch
5. Technology and systems implementation

## Sample projects

- Drive post-merger integration across clinical, HR, IT, and revenue cycle operations
- Build a competitive intelligence database to support R&D decision-making
- Interim CHRO to lead integration of talent and culture following a major acquisition
- Develop enterprise narrative and presentations for board and investor audiences
- Lead commercialization and launch strategy for an innovative digital health offering



In this sector, progress often depends on moving highly specialized work forward without losing time or precision. That is why access to targeted expertise matters so much, particularly when launch, clinical, and commercial priorities are all in motion at once.

## Jeffrey Boyd

Global Managing Partner, Healthcare and Life Sciences  
Heidrick & Struggles

## In-demand skills by life science function

### Access and value

1. Market access and value
2. Communications
3. B2C marketing
4. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions
5. Product launch

### Business and corp dev

1. Post-merger integration
2. Project management
3. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions
4. Business plan development
5. Innovation strategy

### Clinical development

1. Clinical operations
2. Project management
3. Program management office (PMO)
4. Technology and systems implementation
5. Database architecture and data management

### Commercial

1. Product launch
2. Portfolio strategy
3. Project management
4. Growth strategy
5. B2B marketing

### Digital, data, and IT

1. AI and machine learning
2. Technology and systems implementation
3. Project management
4. Change management
5. Data science and data engineering

### Finance

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
3. Post-merger integration
4. Program management office (PMO)
5. Technology and systems implementation

### Human resources

1. Compensation strategy
2. Organizational design and workforce planning
3. Technology and systems implementation
4. Lean / Six Sigma / Total quality management
5. Clinical operations

### Innovation and R&D

1. Project management
2. Business plan development
3. Portfolio strategy
4. Post-merger integration
5. Program management office (PMO)

### Operations

1. Clinical operations
2. Project management
3. Service operations

### Procurement

1. Sourcing and procurement
2. Outsourcing or off-shoring
3. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
4. Clinical operations
5. Market landscape and research

### Strategy and ICGs

1. AI and machine learning
2. Business plan development
3. Market access and value
4. Forecasting
5. Change management

### Supply chain, manufacturing, and quality

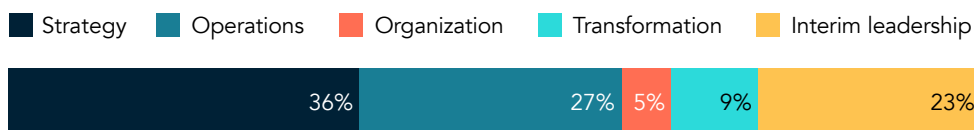
1. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions
2. Project management
3. Change management
4. Manufacturing strategy
5. Supply chain

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Industrial

Industrial leaders are focused on raising productivity and operating performance as they adapt to shifts in demand, supply chains, and production networks. In this environment, independent talent is often deployed to strengthen manufacturing excellence and automation efforts, bringing practical support to plant operations, process improvement, and initiatives tied to capacity, quality, and reliability.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Business processes
3. Growth strategy
4. Mergers and acquisitions
5. IT and tech transformation

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Market landscape and research
3. Operational excellence
4. Post-merger integration
5. Technology and systems implementation

## Sample projects

- Optimize ERP and execute process improvement workstreams in finance and operations
- Interim CIO/CTO to design AI-enabled technology roadmap for growth
- Lead cross-functional integration and carve-out efforts across multiple active deals
- Interim CFO to strengthen FP&A capabilities and build a scalable finance function
- Drive manufacturing plant turnaround to improve quality, delivery, and performance



Industrial companies are being tested on their ability to raise performance while adapting at the same time. Success depends on whether plants, processes, and teams can deliver consistently. Independent talent can be a meaningful lever in making that happen.

### Jane Bargmann

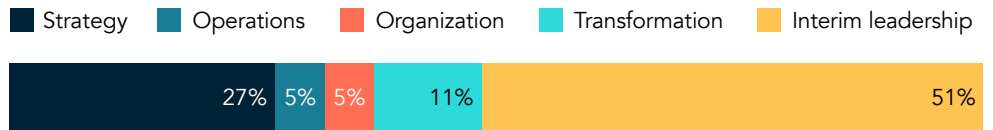
Global Managing Partner, Industrial  
Heidrick & Struggles

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Private Equity

For private equity firms in today's market, value creation depends on executing against multiple priorities at once—from integration and growth to talent and operating model change. To execute against this complexity, they're turning to interim leaders and experienced operators to help drive post-merger integration, improve performance, and move critical initiatives forward across portfolio companies.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Marketing and sales
3. Post-merger integration
4. Human capital
5. Growth strategy

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
3. Process optimization and transformation
4. Organizational design and workforce planning
5. Post-merger integration

## Sample projects

- Interim CFO to drive financial turnaround, manage cash flow, and improve forecasting
- Stand up people operations function and develop CEO succession strategy
- Lead integration planning, governance, and execution for a complex merger
- Enhance FP&A reporting, forecasting, and integration of a newly acquired business
- Manage carve-out execution across governance, TSA, and technology separation



In private equity, value creation is won or lost in execution. The ability to bring in experienced operators at the right moment can make the difference between a plan on paper and results in the numbers.

### Jane Bargmann

Global Managing Partner, Private Equity  
Heidrick & Struggles

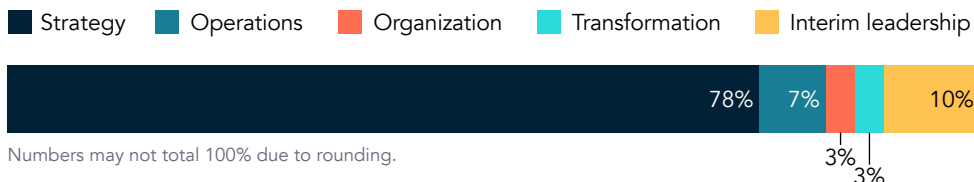


## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Social impact

Mission-driven organizations are working to expand impact while strengthening the capabilities and operating models needed to sustain it. Here, independent talent often adds strategic and programmatic capacity—helping leaders translate long-term priorities into action across diverse stakeholders, partners, and geographies.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Planning
2. Innovation and R&D
3. Interim leadership
4. Product strategy and launch
5. Business intelligence and analytics

## Most in-demand skills

1. Strategic planning
2. Project management
3. Product launch
4. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions
5. Global human resources

## Sample projects

- Align funding and partners to improve education outcomes across sub-Saharan Africa
- Interim COO to lead nonprofit operations and ensure leadership alignment
- Coordinate clinical and preclinical studies across a global research consortium
- Interim CHRO to assess HR processes and solutions for a multi-site organization
- Evaluate media measurement and lead RFP for data and analytics partners



For mission-driven organizations, the question is not whether the work matters; it is whether they have the capacity to translate strategy into execution consistently and at scale. That is often where outside expertise can make a meaningful difference.

### J.J. Cutler

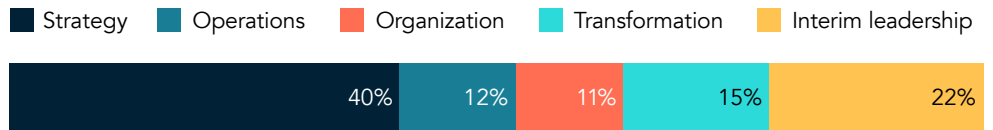
Managing Partner, Social Impact  
Heidrick & Struggles

## TRENDS BY INDUSTRY

# Technology and services

For global technology and services leaders, the challenge is turning innovation into scalable business impact. Independent talent often serves as the connective tissue between new capabilities and commercial results—supporting tech-enabled offerings, AI initiatives, go-to-market refinement, and adoption of new tools and services across complex organizations.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Marketing and sales
3. IT and tech transformation
4. Business intelligence and analytics
5. Human capital

## Most in-demand skills

1. Organizational design and workforce planning
2. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
3. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
4. Corporate and business unit strategy
5. Technology and systems implementation

## Sample projects

- Interim Controller to lead reporting, close process, and complex billings operations
- Facilitate a planning workshop to refine GTM strategy and boost cross-selling
- Elevate product organization with focus on packaging, pricing, and team capability
- Redesign sales organization to strengthen strategic alignment and execution
- Stand up IT and project management function to support scalable growth



In technology and services, innovation only matters if it translates into adoption, revenue, and scale. Talent becomes a real advantage when companies can bring in the expertise needed to connect new capabilities to commercial outcomes quickly and consistently.

### Nicholas DeMagistris

Managing Partner, Technology & Services - Americas  
Heidrick & Struggles

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Business and corporate development

Business and corporate development leaders are pursuing new paths to growth with greater rigor around where and how the business invests. Independent talent is helping teams assess opportunities, shape business cases, and support transactions and partnerships—particularly where commercial judgment, market insight, and strategic clarity need to come together quickly.

## Project categories

■ Strategy
 ■ Operations
 ■ Transformation
 ■ Interim leadership



## Most in-demand projects

1. Mergers and acquisitions
2. Opportunity assessment
3. Growth strategy
4. Product strategy and launch
5. Marketing and sales

## Most in-demand skills

1. Market landscape and research
2. Post-merger integration
3. Project management
4. Strategic planning
5. Growth strategy

## Sample projects

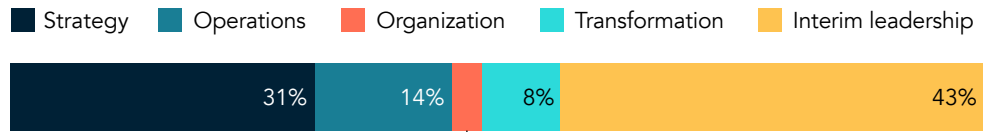
- Assess market entry opportunity and distribution strategy for a new geography
- Drive finance workstreams for carve-out and sale of a highly integrated business line
- Advise on product development and pricing strategy for a new offering
- Map the market landscape and refine product strategy for a subscription business
- Design and pilot growth programs to evolve and scale a B2B offering

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# CEOs and presidents

CEOs and presidents must deliver growth while leading through change, often with little margin for delay or missteps. Independent talent is extending leadership capacity in these moments, with interim executives and trusted operators stepping into high-impact roles to stabilize performance, lead critical initiatives, and strengthen the business for what comes next.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Marketing and sales
3. Business processes
4. Growth strategy
5. IT and tech transformation

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
3. Growth strategy
4. Global human resources
5. Technology and systems implementation (tie)  
Operational excellence (tie)

## Sample projects

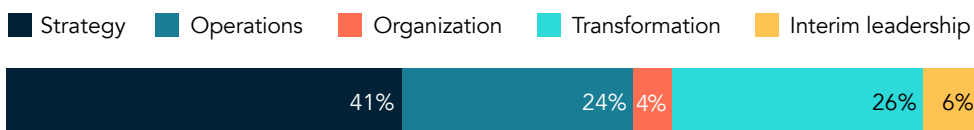
- Lead commercialization and demand planning for new product launches
- Interim CPO to lead global HR and align talent strategy with business goals
- Design marketing strategy to strengthen growth ahead of a sale
- Optimize multi-site field operations to improve performance and drive margin expansion
- Improve sourcing, inventory, and supply chain processes to drive manufacturing efficiency and scalable growth

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Digital, data, and IT

For digital, data, and IT leaders, the mandate is no longer just modernization but proving business value from technology investment. Organizations are turning to independent talent to build and embed data, analytics, automation, and AI capabilities, with support ranging from architecture and implementation to the change management needed for adoption.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. IT and tech transformation
2. Business processes
3. Business intelligence and analytics
4. Digital strategy
5. Interim leadership

## Most in-demand skills

1. AI and machine learning
2. Technology and systems implementation
3. Project management
4. Database architecture and data management
5. Organizational design and workforce planning (tie)  
Strategic planning (tie)

## Sample projects

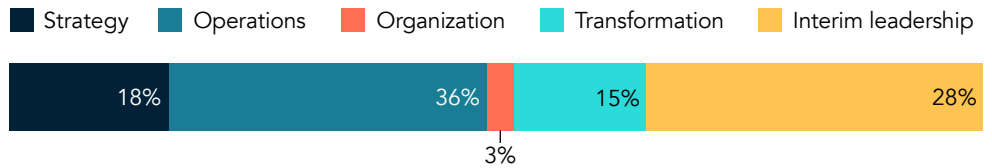
- Interim CISO to steer global cybersecurity, data privacy, and ethical AI implementation
- Stand up a data organization and support Chief Data Officer in business operations
- Develop AI business strategy to drive efficiency and operational performance
- Lead field service platform implementation to support operations and data integration
- Drive AI portfolio management and responsible AI governance across the organization

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Finance

Finance leaders sit at the center of both performance management and business change. As organizations modernize systems, strengthen controls, and navigate increasingly complex demands, many are tapping independent talent to provide interim leadership, specialized expertise, and added capacity across critical finance priorities.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Business processes
2. Interim leadership
3. IT and tech transformation
4. Post-merger integration
5. Planning

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
3. Risk management
4. Growth strategy
5. Project management

## Sample projects

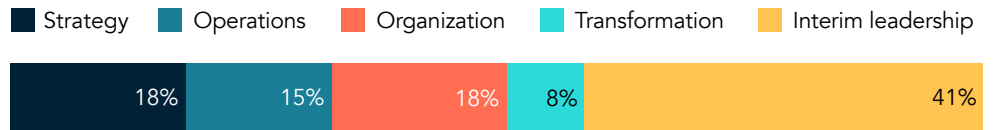
- Interim Controller to support audit readiness and financial stabilization after M&A
- Lead Workday Financials implementation to enable scalable finance operations
- Provide FP&A modeling to ensure financial visibility through a corporate separation
- Drive transformation program execution, cross-functional coordination, and KPI tracking
- Implement data governance program to strengthen data quality and regulatory readiness

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Human resources

HR leaders are at the center of the work as organizations rethink leadership strategies, workforce models, and organizational effectiveness. Independent talent is helping make it all possible—providing leadership continuity in key roles, guiding org design and workforce planning, and supporting the people and culture dimensions of complex transformations.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Interim leadership
2. Human capital
3. Marketing and sales
4. Manufacturing excellence
5. IT and tech transformation

## Most in-demand skills

1. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
2. Organizational design and workforce planning
3. Compensation strategy
4. Financial planning, analysis, and modeling
5. Global human resources

## Sample projects

- Interim VP of HR to lead organizational design and support turnaround efforts
- Lead recruiting operations to support rapid hiring for an early-stage team
- Design and drive global benefits strategy, vendor management, and program execution
- Analyze global compensation and develop salary structures across diverse markets
- Interim payroll lead to oversee payroll operations and ensure SOX compliance

Learn more about the evolving HR function and focus of today's CPO in "[Chief People Officer of 2030: Building a Tool Kit to Get from Here to There.](#)"

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Innovation and R&D

Innovation and R&D leaders are working to move promising ideas toward real-world impact with greater speed and discipline. Independent talent is helping bridge technical innovation and commercialization, with support spanning R&D strategy, launch planning, regulatory pathways, and the translation of complex science into clear value.

## Project categories

■ Strategy ■ Operations ■ Transformation



## Most in-demand projects

1. Innovation and R&D
2. Product strategy and launch
3. Business processes
4. Manufacturing excellence
5. Business intelligence and analytics (tie)  
Planning (tie)

## Most in-demand skills

1. Project management
2. Product launch
3. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions
4. Manufacturing strategy
5. Market access and value

## Sample projects

- Lead technical assessment to identify and resolve product development challenges
- Drive medical affairs execution for an asset in late-stage clinical development
- Develop and execute HEOR and RWE studies across US and EU markets
- Modernize and elevate the R&D PMO through automation and digital enablement
- Define clinical trial framework to support development and commercialization



## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Marketing

Marketing leaders are navigating a more complex path to growth, where launch excellence, sharper targeting, and measurable commercial impact all matter. Companies are bringing in independent talent to shape brand and go-to-market strategy, tailor campaigns to specific markets, and coordinate the partners and channels needed to build awareness and engagement.

## Project categories

■ Strategy
 ■ Operations
 ■ Transformation
 ■ Interim leadership



## Most in-demand projects

1. Marketing and sales
2. Product strategy and launch
3. Business processes
4. Business intelligence and analytics
5. Innovation and R&D

## Most in-demand skills

1. Product launch
2. Market access and value
3. B2B marketing
4. B2C marketing
5. Portfolio strategy

## Sample projects

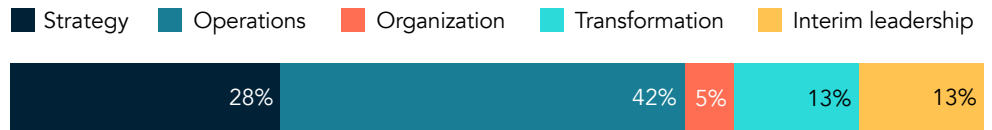
- Optimize lead generation strategy, funnel performance, and sales alignment
- Develop go-to-market strategy to strengthen product positioning and drive growth
- Lead brand marketing activities to ensure continuity during leadership transition
- Create payer engagement materials to enable market access for a rare disease treatment
- Drive launch planning and field engagement for a new B2B loyalty program

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Operations

Operations leaders are focused on improving productivity, resilience, and day-to-day performance in an environment where breakdowns in process, supply chain, or service can quickly affect results. Independent talent is often brought in to stabilize operations, improve plant performance, and lead hands-on efforts to raise quality, service, and cost efficiency.

## Project categories



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.

## Most in-demand projects

1. Business processes
2. Interim leadership
3. Supply chain
4. Manufacturing excellence
5. Service operations

## Most in-demand skills

1. Project management
2. Financial controls, accounting, and audit
3. Clinical operations
4. Process optimization and transformation
5. Regulatory strategy, process, and submissions

## Sample projects

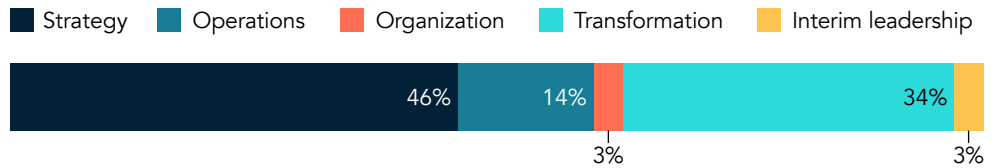
- A team of project managers to drive distribution and operational improvement initiatives
- Assess UX workloads to recommend right-sized resourcing for business priorities
- Drive assessment and improvement of claims operations and catastrophe readiness
- Optimize supply chain model to improve apparel production cost and performance
- Manage warehouse transition and facility expansion across cross-functional teams

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# PMO and transformation

PMO and transformation leaders play a central role in shaping, coordinating, and advancing enterprise change. Independent talent brings added structure and momentum to that work—helping organizations manage complex programs, align stakeholders, and put in place the governance, milestones, and accountability needed to turn strategic priorities into measurable progress.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Planning
2. IT and tech transformation
3. Business processes
4. Change management
5. Innovation and R&D

## Most in-demand skills

1. Project management
2. Strategic planning
3. Technology and systems implementation
4. Program management office (PMO)
5. Corporate and business unit strategy

## Sample projects

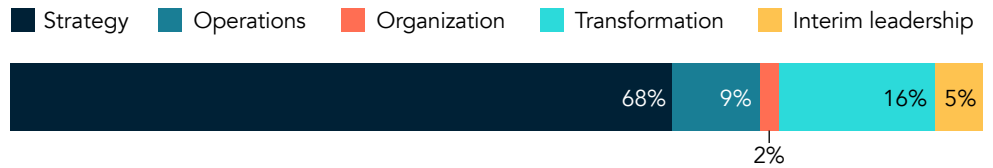
- Interim Chief of Staff to drive transformation workstreams during corporate separation
- Execute transformation roadmap to accelerate value creation in manufacturing business
- Drive Oracle Financials implementation as part of a broader digital transformation
- Execute outsourcing strategy across finance, HR, and IT functions
- Stand up an AI center of excellence to enable enterprise-wide adoption and impact

## TRENDS BY FUNCTION

# Strategy and internal consulting groups

Strategy and internal consulting groups are often called on to frame the company's most important choices—and help ensure those choices translate into action. Independent talent extends the reach of these teams, adding specialized expertise and analytical horsepower for high-priority initiatives ranging from market entry to operating model redesign.

## Project categories



## Most in-demand projects

1. Planning
2. Marketing and sales
3. IT and tech transformation
4. Business intelligence and analytics
5. Change management

## Most in-demand skills

1. Strategic planning
2. Project management
3. Business plan development
4. AI and machine learning
5. Change management

## Sample projects

- Build AI strategy and learning modules for education partners
- Lead market and competitive analysis to support growth initiatives
- Elevate competitive intelligence capabilities to inform category strategy and growth
- Drive sales planning through GTM design, segmentation, and quota setting
- Orchestrate change management for ERP integration across supply chain operations

**Tap experienced interim leaders and experts on a flexible, as-needed basis. Heidrick & Struggles delivers on-demand access to top independent talent to solve significant business problems, drive major transformations, and fill urgent leadership and capability gaps.**

Whether you're facing market volatility, fending off competition, or leveling up your technology and operational capabilities, strong leadership and in-demand skills are essential. Gaps at any level can sap momentum, throw organizations into disarray, and stall progress on important initiatives. When you're short a key player, undergoing an extended search, or building out new capabilities, even temporary solutions can be transformative.

We offer critical talent for critical moments, including:

- Interim executives spanning C-suite to director
- Management consultants and subject matter experts and advisors
- Special project leaders for moments of innovation, transformation, and change

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