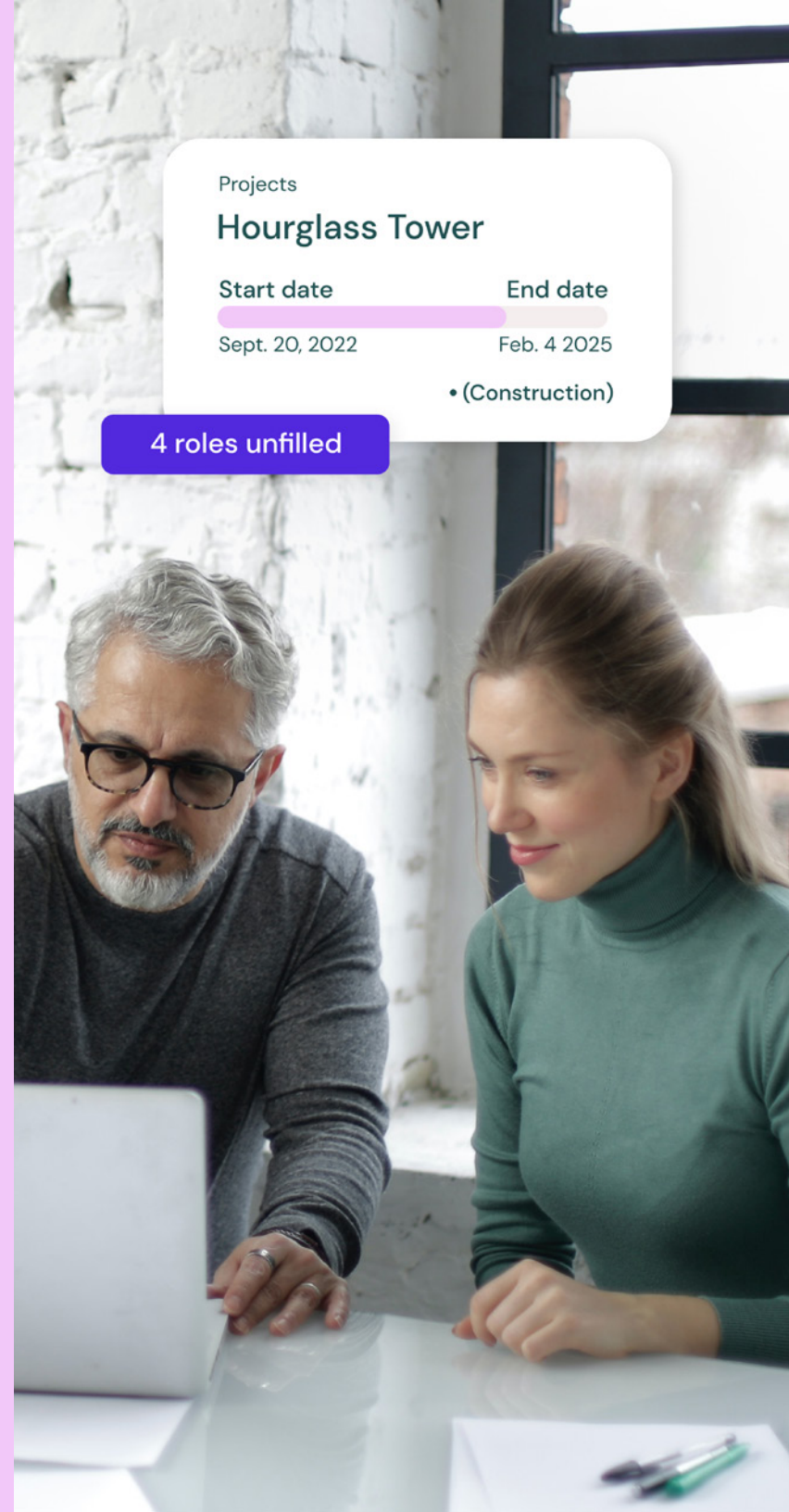


# Strategic Workforce Management – Going From Spreadsheet Maintenance to Workforce Planning Mastery

 **Bridgit** |  **CONSTRUCTION DIVE**

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Last spring, Columbia, a Boston-based construction company, began work on a 113,000-square-foot manufacturing facility for medical supplier Thermo Fisher Scientific.

The new facility in Chelmsford, MA, promised increased production capacity for BioPharma products, such as chromatography resins which are used to purify vaccines.

But, for Columbia, the nearly century-old construction giant whose portfolio includes projects for clients like Microsoft, Siemens, and MIT, the project was emblematic of the chronic staffing challenges confronting the industry.

“When the pandemic was at its peak, the workforce dwindled quickly, leaving us at probably 80% capacity compared with before,” said Shawn Gallant, Vice President of Corporate Development at Columbia.



To add to the challenge, the project ballooned to five times its original scope. Keeping pace with unforeseen production demands brought on by the pandemic meant Thermo Fischer needed more space to boost manufacturing capacity. Planning, managing and executing the \$120 million gut rehab project on schedule required an evolved approach to workforce planning which was previously unattainable with a spreadsheet.

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**Shawn Gallant**

VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT AT COLUMBIA



With a clear picture of where and when people are needed, construction managers can plan long-term business development strategies, forecast staffing and hiring needs, and pick the right project pursuits that align to the availability of existing and future staff.

Industry statistics show a digital-first approach to workforce management is desperately needed.

- 70% of construction companies use paper-based processes\*
- 80% percent of construction companies are struggling to hire trade workers
- 68% of trades point to poor schedule management as the primary contributor to decreased labor productivity

\* <https://gobridgit.com/blog/what-we-learned-at-advancing-construction-quality-2021/>





## Steps Contractors Can Take to Be More Strategic With Their Workforce Management

Many analysts say it is high time for construction companies to embrace a proactive, digital-first approach to workforce management. A report by McKinsey & Company\* recommends construction companies prepare for the “next normal” by establishing a central project management system that can identify and respond to resource-allocation needs across the portfolio.

- 1 Improving workforce visibility across the organization
- 2 Building a talent pipeline by forecasting recruitment needs
- 3 Providing the insights to inform data-driven business development strategies
- 4 Winning project bids by keeping people and resources in mind

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\* <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/operations/our-insights/how-construction-can-emerge-stronger-after-coronavirus>



## 1 Improving Workforce Visibility Across the Organization

Historically, construction firms have relied on a single person to manage projects on a physical whiteboard or spreadsheet. But this approach is fraught with risks. Not only can it result in data silos that keep information inaccessible to those who need it, it can quickly become overwhelming to visualize.

“You can imagine tracking maybe 200–300 people in Excel,” Gallant said. “You’re manually inputting different allocation rates, month by month, for 200 people. Then, let’s say, you have 200–300 projects. Now you’re allocating people in a separate tab. You’re essentially doing a very complicated 3D puzzle.”

Cloud-based tools make it easier for collaborative teams to visualize and update project details and staff assignments. Information displayed in Gantt charts or lists, easily searchable

by office location, project phase, or market segment, gives construction managers a new way to think about projects.

Rich data is the big differentiator. Staff profiles that include project histories, licenses, time allocations, and performance reviews provide a more comprehensive picture of workers’ qualifications and availability.

Because data exists in the cloud, not a siloed spreadsheet, when changes are made, they are instantly accessible to all authenticated users. Intelligent algorithms carry the information across all views, tables and charts, giving teams across the organization a single source of truth.

## 2 Building a Talent Pipeline by Forecasting Recruitment Needs

Lisa Villasmil, Vice President of People & Culture at Caldwell Wingate, said Bridgit Bench has made it easier for human resource and project planning teams to come together to predict and assign roles for awarded projects and those under pursuit. “Now when we’re collaborating we can just say, ‘Check Bench. What does it say in Bench?’ That has really brought us together as a staff.”

The tool allows her to quickly see where people are and get in touch with them, either by phone or email. If a licensed superintendent is needed for a Brooklyn high-rise apartment project set to begin weeks or months ahead, she can filter through individuals whose qualifications and office location meet the needs of the job.

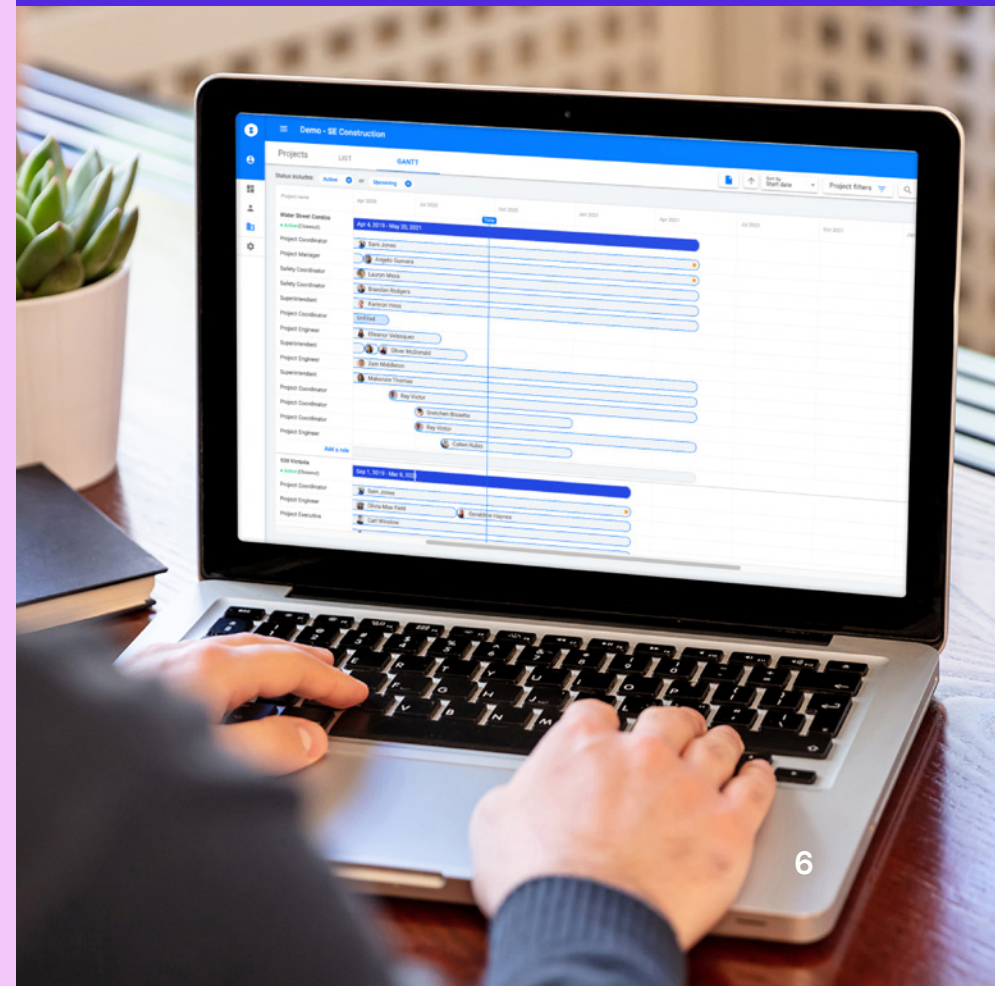
Automated notifications can be set to notify staff of new or pending assignments. Staff licenses, certifications and credentials like OSHA 10, OSHA 30, CPR & First Aid, and CAPM (Certified Associate in Project Management) can be assessed against project requirements. Orange and red status badges signal when credentials are set to expire.

“This extra check helps put the right people on site and avoid huge fines,” Villasmil said.

“Now when we’re collaborating we can just say, ‘Check Bench. What does it say in Bench?’ That has really brought us together as a staff.”

**Lisa Villasmil**

VICE PRESIDENT OF PEOPLE & CULTURE AT CAULDWELL WINGATE





### 3 Providing the Insights to Inform Data-Driven Business Development Strategies

In an industry in which labor accounts for 20–40% of construction costs\*, the workforce utilization rate\*\* is a key metric to assess cost efficiency. A workforce utilization rate below 70% is typically a warning sign that something is amiss. Identifying where staff are underutilized, where they could be more productive in a senior role, or where they are operating over capacity helps optimize productivity and increase worker satisfaction.

“It’s given us a much clearer picture of our recruitment needs. What happens when you don’t have a clear picture of your staff is you don’t see ‘John Smith’ is ready for a promotion, so you hire an outside senior PM instead of promoting internally and backfilling the open position,” Villasmil said.

“This can be detrimental to your diversity, equity, and initiatives,” she continued. “You hire new when you have someone in-house who could be extremely capable yet is overlooked.”

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\* <https://gobridgit.com/blog/how-to-calculate-construction-labor-cost/>

\*\* <https://gobridgit.com/blog/construction-workforce-planning-utilization-rate/>



**“Having the tool on hand lets us keep a lighter bench and automatically yields cost savings,” Villasmil said. “We are able to make sure that our projects justify the current costs of labor as well as decide if the projects can support and/or need additional staff.”**

**Lisa Villasmil**

VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT AT COLUMBIA

In Bridgit Bench, a Strategic Workforce Plan can be configured to plot bar graphs that show the difference between workforce capacity and project demand up to five years into the future. The Bench Cost module enhances that insight by showing the dollar value associated with underutilized workers. The combination of these two features enables your hiring team months to identify vacancies months into the future. It also helps your business development team understand what they need to bid on and for when.

“Having the tool on hand lets us keep a lighter bench and automatically yields cost savings,” Villasmil said. “We are able to make sure that our projects justify the current costs of labor as well as decide if the projects can support and/or need additional staff.”






Photo	Name ↑	Title	Availability (%) until
	Carol Thompson	Superintendent	100% Sept. 24, 2022
	Neil Garner	Project Manager	100% Sept. 24, 2022
	Kristen Quillao	Project Coordinator	100% Sept. 24, 2022
	Marla Roberts	Sr. Project Manager	50% March 31, 2022

#### 4 Winning Project Bids by Keeping People and Resources in Mind

For Columbia, pursuit planning requires probabilistic evaluation of uncertain scenarios. This is where tools like Bridgit Bench allow for visibility lacking in spreadsheet systems, according to Gallant.

“If we think we have a 90% chance of winning a project, we’re going to start to track it as a real project, so we have the right team available,” Gallant said.

Understanding who should be included in proposals is key to winning bids. User interfaces need the granularity to distinguish pending bids from active projects, and the visual real estate to see them at the same time. Priorities shift quickly in construction, and when a job is awarded or pulled from consideration, it can have a butterfly effect that demands an agile response.

During the height of the pandemic when work was “shut down for 12 weeks on pretty much any project that wasn’t a hospital project,” people needed to move—and move quickly, Gallant said. Though Columbia’s hospitality and interior office projects had ground to a halt, the life sciences division was booming. By having a view of where their staff could be reassigned, Columbia retained long-time employees while aggressively pursuing bids in a growing demand sector.

“That was a group of roughly 40 people,” Gallant said of the corporate interiors division. “They’re all working in different sectors right now. On the flip side, if they didn’t have that ability to work in multiple sectors, they might not be with us. You can’t have 40 people sitting on the bench.”



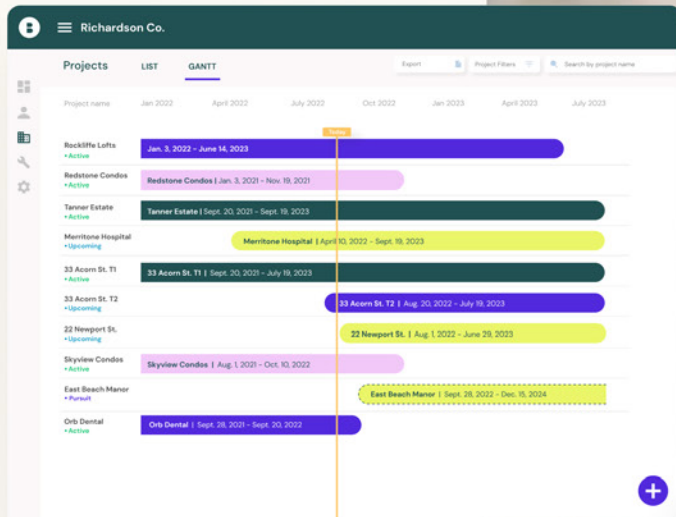
# Bridgit Bench is Helping to Master Workforce Management

Bridgit Bench, the intelligent workforce management tool built based on direct feedback from hundreds of GCs, is used by about 20% of companies in the Engineering News Record’s list of the 400 largest U.S. based general contractors. Bridgit Bench is designed to help project supervisors and human resource leaders improve workforce visibility, forecast staffing, and make data-driven choices about choosing project pursuits they’re most positioned to win.

“The end point,” said David Pimiskern, Head of Customer Success at Bridgit, “is leveraging data to make better decisions and work smarter, which, in turn, makes employees happier.”

Bridgit saw operations managers spending hours trying to maintain their workforce planning process manually. The endless data entry, limited insights, and lack of collaborative tools prevented them from actually trying to manage their workforce effectively. When operations leaders say things like “I felt like I was being banished to the corner to work on a spreadsheet,” Bridgit knew there was an opportunity to help.

Bridgit Bench was built to help GCs adapt their workforce planning to support a new era of project delivery with insights into team utilization, recruitment forecasting, pursuit project management and people financials. Bridgit wants to help GCs become masters of workforce management. To learn more about what Bridgit is doing to help general contractors of every size, visit [gobridgit.com](https://gobridgit.com).





#### ABOUT US

Bridgit is workforce intelligence for the construction industry. Bridgit's mission is to help the construction industry maximize profits by taking a people-first approach. Bridgit transforms workforce data into actionable insights to inform strategic and tactical business decisions. Bridgit works with construction industry leaders like Skanska, Balfour Beatty, Ryan Companies.

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