

Staffing by design



A business strategy cannot be effective unless it is backed up by, among other things, a robust workforce planning process. So what makes workforce planning first-rate?

■ **TESS WALTON**
Executive director
Aruspex

In my view, workforce planning (WFP) is a holistic strategic thinking process that enables an organisation to explore the future, assess options, define targets, decide on the targeted future workforce and define and achieve the actions needed to get there.

A good workforce plan will answer the following questions: which roles are critical to delivering our strategy; do we have the capability/capacity to deliver our strategy; what should we spend our people budget on to build our future?

Every organisation is heading towards a future determined by its current trends in areas such as recruitment, resignation and promotion, as well as by social trends that determine what the available workforce will look like. Therefore an essential component of WFP is to gauge the gap between current workforce trends and the targeted future. WFP involves creating programs and solutions in order to change or promote such trends.

External and internal supply and demand data and trends are critical to good WFP. However collecting the information is not the requirement. Rather it is determining the impact of that information in the context of an organisation's strategy and preferred future.

The workforce is not homogenous, so it is imperative to identify the workforce groups that are critical to the business strategy, as well as those that are misaligned. To produce a balanced workforce plan, I think it is also important to address the supply side of the equation and consider what attracts employees to the organisation, and what motivates and engages them once they are there.

A business strategy without WFP is merely wishful thinking. It is common to hear CEOs say "Talent is my competitive advantage", yet when it comes to business strategy many only outline the number of employees they will have. WFP is the people equivalent of the financial plan and a critical component of an organisation's business strategy.

But good WFP also recognises it has a wider agenda. It is the people component of corporate social responsibility. If organisations start targeting and packaging work differently they have the potential to reduce the number of dependents in society and thus have a significant financial and social impact on the community.

■ **ANN LAWRENCE**
Unit chair, human resource
management
Deakin Business School

The key to strategic success in any organisation is ensuring that its mission and direction are founded on a solid analysis of its

environments—including WFP. It is essential that organisations have up-to-date intelligence of the configurations of employees and their capabilities. They must be able to determine how best to utilise these capabilities and be able to identify the gaps between

the present configuration and the skills, knowledge, work behaviours, values and attitudes employees will need to meet future goals. It is also important to analyse the contribution made by the various technologies used in the organisation to provide



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(continued from page 1)

competitive advantage. This includes the tools and equipment, knowledge and work methods used to produce goods and services, and the competence that the employees have in using that technology.

Another key aspect of WFP is a cultural audit of the organisation that allows the more readily identifiable values and beliefs operating to come to the surface. This will locate possible resistance or blockages to change, as well as support for it.

An understanding of the economic and industry trends—in particular, workforce projections regarding labour availability and costs—is also crucial. Research data can be used to demonstrate practices used by competitors, such as how they are structuring competitive reward packages to attract and retain staff, or responding to current or forthcoming legislation.

Aspects of organisations do not exist independently. Rather there are interconnected relationships between strategy, organisation structure, technology, workplace culture and the competencies embedded in its human capital. When done well, strategic WFP coupled with a supportive organisational structure should allow an organisation to take advantage of its strengths and opportunities, while minimising weaknesses and helping it to fend off threats from competitors.

■ JACQUI CURTIS

Director, strategic capability development team
Australian Public Service Commission

The Australian Public Service Commission is a contemporary, outcomes-focused agency with a relatively small workforce of around 200 staff. It has a evolved HR function where WFP serves as a practical framework for HR activity, provides input into budgetary mechanisms and provides managers with guidance concerning the acquisition, development, deployment and retention of staff.

WFP within the Commission takes place in conjunction with the agency's business planning activities. It takes account of future business directions and workforce requirements to ensure alignment with organisational outcomes and strategic priorities.

The primary intent of the Commission's WFP is business continuity. This means that WFP is mainly focused on recruitment, training, career management, succession planning and retention. There is also a strong emphasis on workforce satisfaction and building workforce capability, which is often associated more with business transformation.

Because of the emphasis on business continuity, internal drivers such as workforce demographics and staff capabilities are the primary sources used to inform WFP. Analysis of external factors such as economic conditions, the social environment, employment expectations, labour market demographics and trends both within the APS and across industry are also used to inform WFP. WFP information is drawn from a range of sources, including the Commission's internal HR databases, the Australian Public Service Employment Database, State of the Service reports, and Australian National Audit Office best-practice guides and reports. External analysis is somewhat restricted by limited resources and there is less use of scenario forecasting than there might be in a larger organisation.

The Commission shares responsibility for WFP between the Executive, business unit and line managers, and the HR team working in partnership. It draws on the expertise and knowledge of line managers for information concerning future staffing requirements and to perform demand forecasts. The HR team has a largely advisory role, providing WFP information and data to unit managers that inform the development of unit action plans developed as part of the business planning cycle.



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