



In today's business world, when it comes to effective workforce planning – especially for the long haul – HR practitioners have never been in a better position to lead. Of course, for some HR executives, strategic workforce planning remains a mystery, a difficult challenge. They are trying to figure out how to help create the best possible foundation of talent throughout the organization for long-term success. On the other hand, there are other HR leaders who are using solutions that have them on the right track.

How so? Apart from taking advantage of the terrific workforce planning analytics tools available today, those HR executives and professionals are also bringing human capital management technology into the mix. Granted, workforce planning will always be part intuition, part science. But using talent management software to help make successful workforce planning happen is doable, and it can contribute to both the “art” and “science” sides of the equation.

Getting In Sync

As organizations try to grow amid the uncertainties of the ongoing global recession, they need to explore and implement new HR processes to ensure that their employees develop the skills and competencies they will need to tackle the business challenges of today and tomorrow. A well-implemented workforce analytics technology strategy is one solution. Another is making sure that any talent management effort also is in sync with the analytics effort. The two can work hand-in-hand, in fact.

For example, succession management – identifying, assessing and developing future leaders and other strategic talent – is a critical workforce management variable. Succession management ensures that the right people are promoted to the right positions, and it channels the right candidates into the right talent pools. Workforce planning can't work without succession management.

Performance management also will play a key role in any workforce planning effort – in particular, linking performance management to capabilities. Capabilities are a powerful tool for driving business impact through individual performance, especially for modern organizations where change is constant; it can help to ensure that employees have the transferable skills and behaviors that support the needs of the business today and where the organization wants to be in five or ten years.

A Major Piece of the Puzzle

Workforce planning has many facets, but developing and building leaders at all levels of an organization is a major

piece of the puzzle. And a good place to start is with talent already within the enterprise.

At a time when there are talent shortages in industries ranging from technology and education to health care, perhaps employees don't have the necessary skills and knowledge because employers don't train them anymore. Using sound HR strategies and a comprehensive technology platform, organizations can create an environment that allows their people to grow professionally and, ultimately, develop new competencies and capabilities that will lead businesses into the future.

These development initiatives should extend far beyond the C-suite and across every level within a company's structure. This is particularly critical for stocking an organization's talent pool, not only with potential leaders and high achievers, but also within the enterprise at all levels. It's no secret that senior management now knows that a well-stocked talent cupboard is critical when planning a future-proof workforce (as least as much as possible).

For entry-level talent, newly minted college graduates typically do not have the skills and experience many employers need now and will need in the future. As a result, organizations looking to plan their workforce within this employee segment often need to take a step back and re-evaluate how they develop, attract and mobilize new employees joining an organization. Onboarding is the perfect time to engage this new talent from day one. Assessments can enable employers to identify high potentials, group new hires into talent pools and create development plans based on assessment results.

Using talent management within any workforce planning effort can reap rewards such as reduced turnover, increased empowerment, a boost in productivity, and successful business goal and strategy execution.

Technically, talent management is not the same thing as workforce planning, but the two share a common objective: They are tightly linked in terms of ensuring that an organization is making the right workforce planning decisions today when facing an uncertain future. It's very clear that using a strong workforce analytics tool in combination with a talent management platform can help HR – and senior management – take much of that uncertainty out of the mix. And that can only be good for business.

About the Author

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