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/IN THE NEWS/

Value Added

Report says more companies focus on workforce planning to heighten productivity.

AN AGING WORKFORCE and an emerging retirement wave are driving more companies toward strategic workforce planning, the Conference Board reported this summer.

It defines "strategic workforce planning" as a process that involves analyzing and forecasting the talent that

companies need to execute their business strategy.

According to a press release from the organization, this relatively new management process is being used to help control labor costs, assess talent needs, make informed business decisions, and assess human-capital needs and risks.

As part of enterprisewide risk management, companies use strategic workforce planning to make sure they have the right people in the right jobs for the appropriate compensation.

Conducted on behalf of senior executives in 23 companies, the study states that these forces also are driving strategic workforce planning:

- current movement and projected labor shortages
- globalization
- the growing use of contingent, flexible workers
- the need to leverage human capital to enhance return
- mergers and acquisitions
- the evolution of workplace technology and tools.

Why change?

"In many companies, traditional workforce planning was an onerous process that HR imposed on management," says Mary B. Young, senior research associate at the Conference Board and author of the report. "Too often, the net result was a humongous report, blinding spreadsheets, and a dizzying amount of data that provided little value to the business."

Methodology is advancing rapidly in response to changing business needs and new tools and technology. The study finds that some organizations have enhanced the simple gap analysis (workforce demand versus supply) that constitutes traditional workforce planning by adopting the logic and analytical tools of other corporate functions, such as finance, strategic planning, risk management, and marketing.

More interaction, less numbers

Rather than relying on spreadsheets and numbers to engage senior executives, the Conference Board suggests focusing on the business plan and its broad implications for the company's workforce. "Establishing consistent, organization-wide data is a prerequisite to winning executives' confidence in strategic workforce planning's results," the release says.

Companies interviewed for the study cite other challenges, such as making the process and tools simple and efficient; developing HR's capabilities and comfort level; establishing a common language to describe jobs and required competencies; and integrating workforce planning with business and budget planning.

Most companies still are in the process of fully implementing strategic workforce planning or realizing its ultimate potential. Yet organizations that say they're "not there yet" report that strategic workforce planning is already delivering value by:

- generating insights and knowledge that executives can use to make business decisions
- providing a deeper understanding of workforce dynamics
- enabling organizations to manage human capital more efficiently (for example, by evaluating the long-term impacts of various staffing options and creating a stronger internal job market)
- enabling HR to realize its long-held desire to become a player and a valued contributor to high-level business strategy decisions.

"Strategic workforce planning enables the organization to slice-and-dice its workforce data to discover critical issues, compare different groups, understand patterns and trends, hone in on critical segments of the workforce such as mature workers and top performers, and customize its approach to managing different segments of its workforce," says Mary B. Young.


She adds that by enabling leaders to see across lines of business, workforce planning can leverage talent within a company. "Ultimately, the same workforce planning database tools will enable employees to shop for new jobs, assess their own developmental needs, and prepare for career moves inside the organization."


The report recommends that organizations build on their previous successes—such as succession planning or embryonic workforce planning efforts—as a first step in companywide implementation. It also stresses that HR partners with other departments such as finance and IT to help move the process forward.


"While no organization claims to have achieved it yet, many believe that the ultimate payoff from strategic workforce planning will be a vibrant, internal job market that transcends the boundaries between business units and geographies," concludes Young. "The company will be able to mine employee data to locate talent anywhere in the organization, woo passive job candidates, and find the best use for each employee."

[MORE/www.conferenceboard.com](http://www.conferenceboard.com)


How Five Major Companies Do It


 The traditional approach to workforce planning analyzes the supply-demand gap and creates a plan to address future staffing needs. This method is used by Providence Health System.

 For 10 years, Dow Chemical has favored a workforce-analytics approach, which mines current and historical employee data to identify key relationships among variables and between workforce and business data.

 The forecasting and scenario modeling approach uses data to create forecasts incorporating

multiple what-if scenarios, which enable executives to evaluate strategic options. A "major bank" described in the study can decide where to locate a new call center based, in part, on this kind of analysis and forecasting.

 Human capital planning, as used by Corning, segments jobs based on their "mission-criticality" and makes different levels of workforce investment in each segment. It focuses on broad trends during a three- to four-year period, rather than a precise headcount and near-term plans.

 Hewlett-Packard and IBM are committed to relying on strategic workforce planning, which must be customized to the specific conditions and needs of both companies.

In IBM's case, HR and finance departments help senior leaders plan to execute their business strategy and manage drivers of labor costs. For HP, high-level discussions and a two-way educational process between business leaders and HR emphasize interaction, not data.

Source: The Conference Board

U.S. Healthcare Shortage: Not Just Nurses

STAFF SHORTAGES continue to challenge healthcare organizations throughout the United States. But a new report has revealed that the crisis has seeped into other fields of healthcare, not just nursing.

“The nursing shortage has received much attention for some time. However, the shortage extends beyond nurses into other categories of healthcare professionals,” says Shyrl Johnston, director of the Metrics Online 2005 year-end report and senior partner of JWT Employment Communications, an international recruitment marketing and internal communications agency. She adds that this problem is intensifying as a result of graying baby boomers whose need for healthcare resources is growing.

“The shortage of healthcare professionals is strongly reflected by the number of days it takes to fill open positions. There are simply not enough candidates in the current marketplace to fill the open positions in many hospitals and healthcare facilities across the country,” adds Cathy Allman, executive director of the National Association for Health Care Recruiters (NAHCR). The association partnered with JWT Employment Communications to develop the Metrics Online Program, which produced the results.

Metrics Online is a national database that aggregates data submitted by human resources professionals to provide national benchmarks for vacancy, turnover, cost-per-hire, days-to-fill, and days-to-start. Those benchmarks show national trends in the healthcare workforce and are used as guidelines for determining staffing, budgetary, and workforce retention plans at healthcare facilities.

Interestingly, the report revealed that the rehabilitation niche among healthcare professionals is particularly at risk:

Healthcare providers should aggressively address the challenges presented by the shortages of all workers.

- Based on full-time equivalent positions the overall vacancy rate for nurses is 10.1 percent. However, the vacancy rate for rehabilitation professionals is higher: 20.8 percent for occupational therapists and 10.3 percent for speech therapists.
- The turnover rate among nurses is high (11.3 percent—even higher among critical care nurses), but the turnover rate for occupational therapists is almost double at 21.8 percent.
- Nearly 55 percent of all vacant rehabilitation positions took between 60 and more than 90 days to fill (75 percent of physical therapist positions, 71 percent of respiratory professional positions, and almost 68 percent of occupational thera-

pists positions.) More than 30 percent of open nursing positions required that long.

“The continued nursing shortage results from tougher educational standards and the failure of the educational system to expand its capacity to train nurses,” notes Johnston. “Last year 30,000 qualified candidates were turned away by four-year colleges because of a shortage of seats. Even larger numbers of qualified candidates were turned away by two-year nursing academic programs because of a shortage of instructors.”

Johnston suggests that healthcare providers aggressively address the challenges presented by the shortages of all workers. “Employers who will be most successful are those who have innovative recruitment and retention programs and remain focused on developing a retention culture.” She also warns that “the demographic phenomenon of aging baby boomers has begun placing unprecedented demands on the U.S. healthcare system, encompassing acute, chronic, and rehabilitative resources.”

Allman agrees: “In order to meet the country’s healthcare needs, we must continue to engage young students’ interest in a career in healthcare and provide an educational track for them to enter college programs and pursue healthcare careers. Educational systems, the government, and the private sector also must provide scholarship opportunities for healthcare educators, and funding for faculty and labs for healthcare students.” She also adds that healthcare organizations must be diligent to make sure they are serving the needs of their employees. Employers who create and maintain positive work environments that allow their employees to feel valuable and have a say in their practices will be less likely to feel the shortage pinch.

/WORKING LIFE/

Handling the Pre-employment Test

JOB SEEKERS shouldn't be surprised when a potential employer asks them to take a test to get the job, according to CollegeJournal.com, the *Wall Street Journal's* guide for career-minded college students. A report published on the site suggested that pre-employment testing is on the rise.

"Candidates should take these assessments seriously because they can measure and predict job success," says Laura Lorber, managing editor of CollegeJournal.com. "They often evaluate how well your work style or personality might fit into the corporate culture."

The website offers these tips to job candidates about pre-employment testing:

Curb your antagonism. Many candidates scoff at having to take a test. "It's better to have a positive atti-

tude about testing and assessments," says Lorber. "It shows that you are open minded."

Clear your schedule. Find out how long a pre-employment assessment might take and make sure you will not have any interruptions or distractions. Some tests can take up to several hours to complete.

Exercise your brain. Familiarize yourself with pre-employment assessments by taking free ones online.

Don't sweat the results. Pre-employment testing is only a part of the hiring process. Candidates who do well in interviews and have the right skills for the job may be offered a position even if they don't do well on pre-employment testing.

MORE www.collegejournal.com

Photo: Getty Images

/COOL TOOL/

Not the Same Old Thinking

CREATIVITY, one of the buzzwords of the 1990s, is back in book form. A second edition of *Thinkertoys*, the bestselling release from Michael Michalko, and updated brainstorming tools are ready to help you think like a genius.

Written for those who believe that creativity can be taught, the book is filled with fun, thought-provoking exercises and techniques that any workplace learning and performance professional can add to her training repertoire. Each "thinker-toy" contains specific instructions and an explanation of why and how the technique works. It also includes anecdotes, stories, and examples of how others have implemented it to produce breakthrough ideas.

Michalko's interest in creative thinking started as an Army officer. He organized a team of NATO intelligence specialists and international academics to study all known inventive-thinking methods. He also facilitated CIA think tanks and has helped organizations apply creative thinking to solve tough business problems.

This new paperback version of *Thinkertoys* couples with a revised version of the 56 brainstorming cards, dubbed *Thinkpak*. Four different cards comprise the



deck. The first is a reference list of Michalko's nine principle strategies, which form the acronym SCAMPER. The other cards are either "idea stimulators" or the techniques to use and evaluate your fresh ideas.

Both the book and the cards are teeming with puzzles, tricks, and

even optical illusions the stimulate ingenuity. Even better, they are reasonably priced: \$19.95 for the book and \$16.95 for the deck.

MORE www.creativethinking.net

/WORKING LIFE/

Business Casual is the New Black

BUSINESS CASUAL is the new black, according to a national fashion survey for executives conducted in August by TheLadders.com, an online job search engine for high-paying positions. Seventy-eight percent of the executives questioned in the company's "Fashion in the Workplace" said that they prefer more casual over formal work clothes.

Business casual attire is currently the standard dress code, and a trend that will continue to grow at the majority of U.S. companies, according to 65 percent of executives surveyed. In addition, employees who are dressed casually are perceived to be creative and more fun, however, they also run the risk of being taken less seriously.

For the employees who like to suit up, dressing more traditionally has benefits. More than 70 percent of executives said that they perceive employees dressed in suits to be more senior level, while 60 percent said those in suits are taken more seriously. Unfortunately, they also are seen as less creative and even rigid.

"Seventy percent of the executives surveyed said that clothes can help present the right image. I agree with them wholeheartedly," says Marc Cenedella, president and CEO of TheLadders.com. "Presenting yourself in the best possible light, whether you're dressed for a relaxed or formal environment, can help boost your confidence level. When you look good, you feel good, and you increase your shot at success."

Researchers also discovered what not to wear in the workplace. The survey uncovered the most common fashion faux pas in the office: wearing revealing clothes, which was followed closely by wearing flip-flops. Fifty percent of executives said employees push the boundaries of office dress codes by wearing jeans. Other reported inappropriate fashions in the office include sleeveless shirts, athletic shoes, visible tattoos and piercings, and clothing with inappropriate slogans.

MORE/www.theladders.com

/FAST FACT/

Wanted: Scapegoats

According to the nearly 15,000 participants of The Table Group's online team assessment, 68 percent of teams have serious problems with accountability. They also wrestle with an absence of trust (44 percent), fear of conflict (39 percent), avoidance of commitment (25 percent), and inattention to results (28 percent).

Sixty-eight percent of teams have serious problems with accountability.

Ironically, the scores also showed that the higher the position in the organization, the more pronounced the problem. Of the 132 executive teams, 80 percent scored poorly on accountability. The Table Group's founder and president, Patrick Lencioni says that is because members of an executive team usually have similar socioeconomic status and, therefore, don't feel justified to comment on a peer's performance.

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