

## Workforce Planning: Planning For the Future, Rather than Recreating the Past

Workforce planning in the most stable of organizations is a seemingly straightforward task: consider the workforce supply, forecast the demand, and bridge the gap. Reality is often something quite different. More often than not, emphasis is erroneously placed on the quantitative: crunching historic demographic data and attempting to extrapolate future demand. While sound data is clearly important in feeding supply and demand analyses, overemphasizing this component of the workforce planning process often dooms an organization to merely repeat the past, rather than actively transform an organization's vision of the future into tomorrow's reality.



Workforce planning must be viewed as an integrated process for identifying, securing, and developing the human capital required to support the organizational mission, and for developing and implementing the strategies to meet these objectives.

Too often organizations fail to effectively build the true foundation and structure of the workforce planning process: alignment with mission and strategy, and actionable solutions and feedback loops. The data feeding the supply and demand analyses can be thought of as the necessary fuel that powers the machine, yet it is meaningless unless the levers exist to effectively harness, transform, and direct the input.

The world in which organizations find themselves is increasingly volatile, as organizations are confronted with economic, political, and competitive pressures. Front-line managers deal with these pressures every day and know the sets of skills, competencies, experiences, and capacities the workforce needs to respond to them. They are also the group least likely to engage in systematic workforce planning.

Effective workforce planning aligns an organization's workforce with its mission, strategic plan, and budgetary resources. Workforce competencies and capacity must be mapped to future needs, as identified in the mission, strategy, and other improvement initiatives. It is this map that will serve to guide the organization as it builds its workforce of the future.

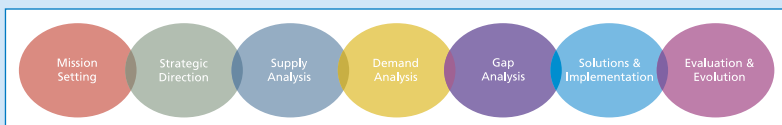
Our experiences working with government clients have pointed to the need for a flexible approach to workforce planning that engages managers and allows organizations to respond to, and effectively navigate, the rapidly changing environment in which they find themselves.

Today's emphasis and priorities may not be tomorrow's. A myriad of questions often arise. What skills should we buy (hire)? What skills can we rent (contract for) in the future? What can we produce or deliver through partnering with other organizations? What skills should we build through development of the current workforce? The answers to these questions, and more, will help shape the form of the future workforce.

Once these questions are answered, workforce data analysis and future modeling are important components of gauging supply and demand analysis. Organizations can improve the quality and specificity of their workforce planning by

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*Workforce Planning can be best viewed as a chain, whose strength and integrity are only as strong as its weakest link.*



using workforce analytical software tools that can provide trends in hiring, attrition, retirements, competencies, and succession plans.

A data model and system to catalog and extrapolate the managerial, leadership, and technical competencies available within the workforce, and in what relevant capacities, are a necessary component to workforce planning. There must be an effort to populate the database, which involves data collection, entry, and verification. Balancing the complexity of the task and the speed with which it must be completed requires considerable project management experience coupled with information technology development expertise.

Some of the most successful government organizations answer these questions by creating greater flexibility and specificity in hiring and training employees. They recruit, select, and train multi-skilled employees to fill different roles. In addition, they ensure that alternative hiring mech-

anisms exist to obtain and interchange specific skill sets as needed. When working in concert, these efforts allow organizations to effectively respond to changing or emerging priorities.

Organizations tend to recreate the past rather than actively define their future. Frontline operating managers frequently address workforce planning in reaction to their own immediate needs or in response to an annual budgeting exercise. Therefore, solutions are implemented in an ad hoc, narrow manner. Managers need to be challenged to consider longer-term organizational needs and engaged to identify the competencies they will need in the future.

Organizations must continually monitor and assess the effectiveness of their workforce plan against the organization's mission and strategy as well as the shifting external environment, refining and redirecting efforts and resources. As the ad hoc is transformed to the strategic, the chain must be structured so that, rather than being linear in shape, it is circular and includes a feedback loop. Performance based metrics must be infused, and corrective action mechanisms established.

For more information about ICF Consulting's workforce planning capabilities, please visit

[www.icfconsulting.com/workforce-planning](http://www.icfconsulting.com/workforce-planning).

