



How to Get Strategic Workforce Planning Right

The continual advance of technology means organisations must consider its impact on their business and employees.

David Hobbs looks at the challenges facing leaders



With the continual advance of technology and the disruption it can generate, business leaders are facing questions around workforce requirements and how they can best provide for their organisations and employees in a changing world.

Findings from Criticaleye's [HRD Retreat 2019 Research](#) revealed that 87 percent of HRDs said they are facing business model disruption and their top priority is to retain talent and develop new skills.

However, workforce planning is not something for HR departments alone and neither is it a prescriptive practice nor an exact science – variations from organisation to organisation are inevitable.

Devyani Vaishampayan, Non-executive Director of BQF and a former FTSE 100 CHRO, says that businesses must consider the rise of the 'external workforce' and technology when addressing future requirements.

"The use of interims and contract skills is getting more common," she says. "However, 75-80 percent of the workforce today is still made up of full-time employees. This is expected to fall to 30 percent over the next few years because of two factors – machines replacing humans and the growth of the 'gig' economy.

"Strategic workforce planning will need to look at talent acquisition, career development and performance and reward processes very differently for this changing workforce."

Charlie Wagstaff, Managing Director at Criticaleye, believes businesses must change now. "Strategic workforce planning

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has come of age," he says. "Technology and the changing nature of business operations means more fluid skillsets are relevant now and for the future.

"Businesses have to act today and ensure they are future fit with the right people in the right places – it's non-negotiable."

Motie Bring, General Manager of EMEA for the Global Enterprise eCommerce business at Worldpay, has first-hand experience of how new technology is changing the workforce. "We needed to move to a different way of working from a technology point of view, so we ended with an agile way of working to enable us to develop faster, keep up with the pace of change and... stay ahead of the game.

"You make sure you have staff who can embrace and cope with change on all different levels," he says.

Where Responsibility Lies

With changing workforces and transforming business models, a question arises around whether responsibility for retraining and reskilling rests with the employer or employee.

Andrea Dunstan, Non-executive Director at TI Fluid Systems and former Chief People Officer at Premier Farnell, says: "You can reskill some or all of your existing workforce – employers have a responsibility to evaluate that objectively and to decide what it is realistic to do."

It's a view with which **Devyani** agrees, adding that it makes sense from a commercial perspective. "There's the question of cost – retraining and reskilling can help avoid expensive redundancies and employee disengagement.

"Another factor is the changing need to acquire high-tech skills due to the increasing impact of digitisation. In a few years, businesses will be chasing the same external pool of limited and expensive talent so it's sensible to see how they can reskill their existing workforce."

However, different organisations will find different solutions and often that will come down to company size and resources. "How particular skills are developed or acquired can depend upon the nature of the business – fast growing, more agile businesses, may be more acquisitive," says **Andrea**.

"Acquisition is a very quick way to buy a particular skill or talent set – it's a fast solution because these organisations tend to be more agile and smaller, plus they are unencumbered by bigger company processes which may slow things down. If it works it is a fast solution, but it is a higher-risk approach." >



Tim Kiy, Chief of Staff at Barclays Africa Group, says that leaders need to look closely at their businesses before acting. “You need to have a clear vision of what you’re moving to either in terms of reshaping the business going forward or giving it course correction. What is the destination you’re moving towards and what does that look like in terms of the operational side of the business and your employee base?”

“Your whole concept of recruitment and taking people through a personal career path, or a development plan, needs to be thought through just as much as the current workforce and what changes they may face.”

Motie agrees that embracing new ways of working goes right to the top of an organisation. “You need the leadership to have a vision around it; have a plan they want to execute; and you need to have buy-in from stakeholders from the different parts of the business. It’s not something that only one part of the company can work on without others joining in; that will not succeed.”

For **Andrea**, similar questions arose at Premier Farnell, which had to move from a regional to a global operating model in order to remain competitive. Closely analysing the business and identifying where it fell short allowed the leadership team to evaluate what skills, capabilities, attitudes and mindsets it would need going forward.

“It is key when undertaking a substantive business change that the right leadership tone and behaviour is set at the top of the organisation. If leaders can’t make the change and instead continue to exhibit the old

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behaviours of ‘I am doing it my way’, then they have to be exited, which is what we did.”

Learning Culture

Tim identifies three levels in the business that should be brought into strategic workforce planning – the executives, the managers and the individuals. The executive team needs to look at the business strategy and assess what changes to the workforce are implied. Then it should consider how it can best support the managers who may require training to oversee the people doing those new jobs. Finally, it must think about what the business can do for the individual employees who need to develop such new skills.

“It’s about how you re-orientate your entire business to a learning culture that’s going to be flexible, adaptable and future fit at any point, because you don’t know what the future may bring,” he says.

The biggest challenge when looking at long-term workforce requirements is around the attitude and mindset of people. “Getting the culture right and maintaining it is not an easy thing to do and people talk about culture almost glibly at times,” says **Tim**, “but you really do need to understand what type of organisation you want and then work very hard at moving the organisation to that space and then staying there.”

Andrea adds: “To enable change the senior leaders must lead by example – whether or not they are new to the organisation – and live the new attitudes, behaviours and skills that are needed. They play a fundamental role in enabling the change to happen, and helping to break down the change resistance which inevitably will be present.” ■

Featuring Commentary From:



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