

Do You Need Workforce Planning?

Workforce planning is becoming one of the most essential topics for pharmaceutical industry executives and HR managers today.

What is it, and how will it benefit my company?" you ask. Simply put, workforce planning is the process by which a company ensures that it has the appropriate number of employees with the right skill set that are necessary for the company to reach or exceed its goals at any given time. The benefits of devising a workforce plan include increased productivity and revenue, decreased labor costs and better management of labor shortages/surpluses.

Some of the main components of workforce planning include:

- Forecasting supply and demand cycles;
- Recruiting / Sourcing talent;
- Retention of current employees / Succession planning;
- Assessment of competency needs;
- Redeployment of employees that are not part of the personnel forecast;
- Skill enrichment and leadership development for current employees.



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How many times have you found that you had to lengthen deadlines during peak periods in order to meet production requirements? Or, had a surplus of talent when you didn't need it, and a shortage of talent when you did? Workforce planning helps to smooth out those inevitable business cycles, and prevent human capital shortages and surpluses before they occur. It promotes an environment of preparedness so you, and your plant's operations, won't miss a beat.

WORKFORCE PLANNING ESSENTIALS

So, you're thinking that the idea sounds appealing, but also sounds like a lot of work, right? Wrong. The process can be as complex, or as simple as you want it to be. There are no right or wrong roadmaps here, as long as you reach your end-goal. Whether you decide to start small and focus only on a few departments, or to start a company-wide initiative, you will need buy-in from your staff. Focus on senior and mid-level managers who will be able to provide you with the support and information you will need. It may even be helpful to form a workforce planning committee comprised of some of those individuals. There are three major components of the process that will help you to implement your own workforce plan successfully. They are: analyze, strategize, and implement.

Here's a closer look at what you can do to get started today.

ANALYZE THIS

As the end of the year approaches, this is the perfect time to take a look back at the year's business cycles in order to prepare for the next one. Workforce planning is all about analyzing supply and demand cycles, and their correlation to labor shortages and surpluses. There may be times that you were clearly overstaffed, understaffed, underutilized the talent of your current staff, or could have reallocated manpower in different directions to better impact output and revenue. Scrutinize the situations where money and resources were not used to their fullest potential, and consider what could have been done differently.

Some questions to ask yourself include:

- Were there peak periods during the year where overtime costs caused unit costs to be out of line?
- Did deadlines have to be extended at the expense of customer satisfaction?
- Did any department experience unusual changes in quality, turnover or employee morale?
- Are there enough people on staff to adequately handle the varying workload?
- Are there too many people on staff wasting valuable dollars on excess overhead?
- Did job vacancies sit open for too long before appropriate talent was found?
- Is there a process in place to enrich the skill set of employees who may be targeted for leadership roles in the future?

Once you have analyzed the answers to these questions, and identified the key supply and demand cycles, you will be able to start closing the gap between the two, thus eliminating surprises.

Some other points to consider include:

- Projected vacancies due to retirement or natural attrition;
- The pipeline and sourcing of available talent;
- Available budget for hiring/redeployment of personnel;
- Competency levels and career development of internal staff.

Don't lose focus of your goal: To be able to put together the best team possible, when and where you need them.

STRATEGIZE, STRATEGIZE, STRATEGIZE

In order to keep a competitive edge in today's cutthroat pharmaceutical industry, strategic thinking is a must. That being said, this is probably the most important and time-consuming part of the process. Enter, "Workforce Planning Committee". Brainstorm with your team to come up with the best solutions to the challenges you will most likely encounter in the coming year.

These action plans should be comprised of specific tasks that are ranked in order of priority. The more specific the tasks, the better. For example, if you are forecasting a peak production period in the second quarter, your first action plan should be to set a budget for hiring/training current staff. You may have ten or more tasks under that plan before it can be completed that could include such items as determining the exact number and skill sets of employees needed. While formulating your tasks and action plans it is important to keep in mind that there may be certain limitations that influence your decisions such as timeframes/deadlines, budgets, and available resources.

The objective behind these actions plans is to be as proactive as possible in order to avoid surprises. That is not to say that once you have a workforce plan in place, you will be impervious to all staffing issues, but you will be better equipped to deal with whatever comes your way.

IMPLEMENT THE PLAN!

This folks, is where the rubber meets the road. The best plans in the world accomplish nothing if they are not executed properly. There are several things that need to come together in order to make all the hard work you've done thus far a success.

Below is a step-by-step guide to ensure a smooth implementation of your ideas.

- **Communicate and Educate** – Hold mini-workshops with the key people on your staff to educate them on workforce planning, and how this new system is going to positively impact the company.
- **Ensure Accountability** – Consider including it as a point of discussion during annual employee reviews, or offer a bonus plan for stellar participation.
- **Be Open to Feedback and Suggestions** – Most times, mid-level management has the best idea of what's going on at the ground level of a company and can offer very valuable information that will help the process succeed.
- **Monitor and Revise the Plan** – Reconvene with your Workforce Planning Committee on a regular basis to monitor progress, troubleshoot problem areas, and to make revisions to action plans and tasks.

DO YOU NEED WORKFORCE PLANNING?

The primary reason for implementing a workforce plan is economics. If done well, workforce planning will increase productivity, cut labor costs, and dramatically cut time-to-market because you'll have the right number of people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time.

So, do you need workforce planning?

A better question might be can you compete without it? Workforce planning works because it forces everyone

to look to the future, while preventing surprises. It requires managers to plan ahead and to consider all eventualities. With a little effort and a lot of determination workforce planning could very well be the best thing to happen to your business!