
WORKPLACE MATTERS

Now is the time to plan work force improvements

As our area begins to slowly recover from the economic downturn, many businesses are looking ahead to see what they'll need when business picks up. This lull during the transition from recession to recovery makes a great time to develop a strategic work force plan, which can help companies evaluate their organizational capacity. A key question: Do you have enough workers with the right skill sets to meet



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the future needs of your business?

First, try to clear up what the future holds for your business and industry. Review existing business plans, goals and projections. Assess the emerging trends and technologies in your industry. Consider your regulatory and business environment. You'll find lots of sources to help. Look to industry and professional associations, specialty publications and competitors' best practices.

Review local unemployment statistics, wage information by occupation, general economic trends, etc. The best source for local labor information is the Oregon Employment Department (www.qualityinfo.org).

Workforce analysts at local Worksource Oregon's Employment Department can help you sort through this information. This service is available at no cost to businesses. Mike Meyers, Lane County's Workforce Analyst, can be reached at 541-686-7670 or Michael.J.Meyers@state.or.us.

He's optimistic about the coming turnaround. "Right now, you really want to plan for growth. Things are only going to get better ... going forward, but employers need to be able to make informed decisions. That's where we can come in."

Secondly, profile your current work force based on your projections for future needs. What are the strengths,

competencies, longevity and engagement levels of your key employees? Do they have skills and capacity that you haven't used? What gaps need to be addressed? You may find:

Talent shortages: What positions and skills are hard to recruit or retain? Are any of your key people within three years of retirement?

Increased need for innovation: What skills and experience do you need to hire or train to increase your capacity for innovation?

Demographic changes: What accommodations might you need for an aging, increasingly diverse work force?

Leadership development: Who is on the bench for your future leadership needs? A succession plan can ensure a successful transfer from seasoned employees to rising stars.

Now, you are ready to develop your strategic work force plan. The overall goal is a high performance work force to carry out your business agenda. The plan should include:

- ◆ Specific measured tactics to address identified gaps. Examples of tactics may include job redesign, technology adoption and process improvement programs.

- ◆ Training and development for your current work force. Many businesses find that hiring people with critical skills from the outside can be expensive and unsustainable. Consider cross-training and "grow your own" models.

Don't use the current recession as an excuse to put off strategic planning. Businesses that plan during this time will be ahead of the curve when the economy turns around.
