

# Workforce Planning with Smarts





You may be thinking, “strategic workforce what?!” Rest assured, you’re not the only one confused by what some people refer to as **headcount planning**. But it’s much more than that!

*Essentially, workforce forecasting is looking at the long-term strategy of the business and aligning strengths to make sure the company is stocked with talent to execute the plan.*

Most HR and business leaders make the mistake of looking at strategic workforce planning as a way to find exact headcount predictions based on business data. But it’s not really that.

A company’s strategic workforce planning strategy needs to be a ‘holistic’ one; therefore, if a strategic workforce plan is giving a nice, neat set of numbers, it’s probably wrong!

In the projection, where you are providing insights to the business based on more than just its talent and capabilities – it must take into consideration everything that’s happening around the business: good and bad.

For example, let’s take the world of print publishing.

A traditional, almost 'old school' environment, where most of the talent was blue collar print operators, clocking in at 9 a.m. and clocking off at 5 p.m. Finding three generations of grandparents, parents and children all working together was the norm – they offered a job for life.

Their view was that print could never go out of business. Why? People would always read newspapers, magazines and books. But, they were wrong.

One of the things this HR Director mentioned was that the business had a sense of naivety and didn't look to the future to see the massive wave ahead of them – the digital revolution.

The fact that the business continued to attract and recruit the same skills profiles, ignoring the external industry trends, meant that by the time print went digital, its demise was inevitable.

The business didn't foresee the crippling impact this trend would have on their strategy, resulting in savvy competitor organizations capitalizing on all the new skills and talent, enabling them to successfully embed a digital transformation strategy.

Strategic workforce planning is about understanding what is critical to the success of the business. In the above case, print operation was a declining skill; it had to give way to digital talent, which was an entirely new skills profile, requiring a different strategy in order to engage, attract, develop and retain talent.

This example proves the importance of having a well thought out strategic workforce plan. It needs to be one that combines a segmented approach, underpinned by a strong employee value proposition (EVP), an understanding of trends and how to leverage data and analytics.

Think of it as a way of future proofing the business by building in scenarios and enabling the business to rapidly respond to the ever-changing landscape.