

## **Getting to grips with strategic people needs**

While every HR function may have got the message about talent management, more are realizing that this raises a larger question: What kinds of people, skills and capabilities in what quantities does the business need to meet its strategic goals? Some companies might have a stab at answering the question. Few have an informed opinion.

According to the Institute for Corporate Productivity, i4cp, a membership-based, vendor-free network of corporations focused on productivity improvement, the strategic imperative is the primary reason for a resurgence of interest in workforce planning.

In today's more chaotic and competitive operating conditions, there are plenty of other reasons why companies are turning their attention to this discipline.

Research by i4cp's flushed out a number of triggers, including "talent shortages, productivity needs, demographic changes, leadership development, engagement concerns". Overriding all these factors, though, is the need to meet corporate goals, summed up by one of its advisory board members: "We found ourselves lacking in our ability to understand our strategic talent needs."

Workforce planning, the latest incarnation of manpower planning, introduced four decades ago, is still evolving. While the institute's research shows a rising uptake of the practice, with 70% doing some form of workforce planning, it points out that it is generally limited to short-term, operational needs. Far fewer companies are looking at this from a strategic angle, which involves getting stuck into business planning, needs assessment and scenarios.

These is i4pc's recommended four-step process for companies to follow in assessing the value of workforce planning:

1. "If your organization doesn't have a formal workforce planning process, then it should evaluate whether its long-term performance could be improved by one.
2. "If your organization has or adopts a WFP process, determine how to make it strategic rather than just operational.
3. "Make sure there's a champion for it at the senior management level, someone who understands its importance to long-term organizational success.
4. "HR should provide the necessary support and data for WFP, but it must have the business partners necessary to ensure that plans turn into realities, the kinds that support strategic business goals."

More information: [www.i4pc.com](http://www.i4pc.com)