

# Strategic Workforce Planning Program a Critical First Step of Workforce Optimization

July 17, 2017 • Thomas E. O'Rourke

The long-running struggle of manufacturers to find and retain employees to fill open jobs has been well documented and a topic of seemingly unending discussion and debate.

Is there a true skills gap? Is the issue really a wage gap? Is there an overall shortage of people? Or is the problem tied to other root causes?

Regardless, there are steps small and mid-size manufacturers can take to address their crucial workforce needs.



It may seem like common sense, but a highly necessary, and too often overlooked, first step is to develop an effective Strategic Workforce Planning Program. This likely represents a departure for many manufacturers, who tend to focus on immediate employment issues, instead of proactively planning for their short- and long-term workforce needs.

The Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership offers a variety of human capital services, including assisting in the development of a Strategic Workforce Planning Program, for manufacturers that are serious about addressing their talent needs once and for all.

The program involves analytics, forecasting and the development of plans that allow manufacturers of all sizes to identify the talent and resources needed in terms of the size, type, and quality of workforce to achieve all-important business objectives. The focus is centered on a comparison of current and forecasted headcount and position needs in order to determine talent gaps while taking into consideration a company's strategy, business plan and budget.

Plans are then built to close those gaps in talent.



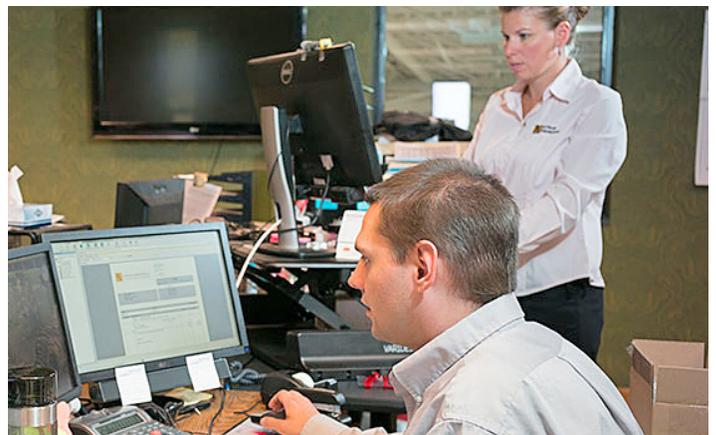
A Strategic Workforce Planning Program has many benefits, not the least of which is building a sufficient workforce to proactively meet production and internal demands.

Many manufacturers are seeking a silver bullet when it comes to addressing talent needs. Jeans Days and group outings are nice perks for employees, but they don't offer a viable solution to attracting and retaining talent.

A Strategic Workforce Planning Program involves a tools-driven, methodology-based, and data-focused approach that allows manufacturers to map their business strategy to a people plan by incorporating key activities such as: defining workforce supply through a skills inventory and other workforce analytics; identifying and prioritizing gaps between workforce supply and demand; developing workforce planning strategies to close the gaps; and identifying opportunities to redeploy talent throughout a company.

The redeployment of existing talent can be especially beneficial and offer a strategic alternative to solving a real or perceived shortage of talent. There are often existing employees who have untapped talent or can be trained to do other jobs or take on additional roles. It may take some creativity, but the answer to many workforce needs can be right in front of you by optimizing the existing talent on hand.

The other benefits of a Strategic Workforce Planning Program include managing attrition rates due to a tight labor market; proactively addressing the looming retirement bubble; ensuring that workforce costs are aligned with desired metrics; and becoming a more attractive workforce destination when recruiting against key competitors.



Without a workforce plan, manufacturers often find themselves in constant catch-up mode when it comes to recruiting and retaining employees. Developing a plan is a necessary first step and, manufacturers will find, not the burdensome chore they may expect or fear.

Many manufacturers, and businesses in general, are having an epiphany about workforce planning and are finally coming to the realization that it involves more than simply posting open jobs.

For more information on the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership's workforce planning and human capital offerings, and other services, please visit:  
[www.wmep.org](http://www.wmep.org).

*Tom O'Rourke is President and Chief Executive Officer of Connolly Clarke, LLC, a human capital advisory firm, which is providing services for clients of the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership*