

# Developing a Strategic Staffing/Workforce Planning Web Site

Clearly, strategic staffing/workforce planning is a powerful tool that can be used to identify and address staffing issues almost anywhere in an organization. Whether those implementing the process are managers or primarily human resource (HR) professionals, they need ready access to strategic staffing knowledge, experience, tools, examples, information, and other resources. Needless to say, it doesn't do much good to develop processes that managers don't know about or understand or to develop tools that no one has access to. Nor does it work to hoard the data and support within HR, doling it out carefully on a controlled, need-to-know basis. You should get your strategic staffing/workforce planning capability out there to all those who need it as efficiently as possible. A strategic staffing web site, running on your company's intranet, can meet these needs quickly and inexpensively.

## **Why Create a Web Site?**

Strategic staffing is an ideal Web-based application. Whether it is on the Internet or on your own intranet, a strategic staffing web site can provide your users with exactly the help they are looking for, exactly when they are looking for it. In different situations, user needs can vary widely, but a Web-based application can offer the kind of flexibility required to meet varying needs effectively and efficiently. There are many good reasons for developing a Web site, but four of them are particularly important.

## ***Expand the Reach of Your Expertise***

It is likely that many managers in your organization will be participating in the strategic staffing/workforce planning process at some level. At

some point, each of these individuals will need information or tools in order to develop staffing strategies and plans. Traditional communication channels may provide what is necessary, but these channels are probably going to be ineffective (e.g., they may provide all users with the same information, regardless of need). They may also be inefficient (defined in terms of cost and response time), which means that distribution of the information will be limited (e.g., in order to control process costs). Requests may stack up if they are coming in faster than they can be resolved.

A strategic staffing web site can provide users with immediate and constant access to the specific information and tools that they need in order to develop and implement their staffing strategies and plans. There will be no gatekeepers or bottlenecks that restrict the flow of needed information or limit access to helpful tools. Managers will not have to wait for HR staff to become available to answer their questions. Use of a web site will allow users to find what they need 24 hours a day/7 days a week—an especially critical requirement in a global company that is conducting business around the clock. An “ask the expert” section allows users to post, and receive customized answers to, their specific questions without having to track down individual HR staff.

Because all important strategic staffing/workforce planning information and tools are located in a single place, it will also be easier for you to maintain and update this information; this means that users will always be accessing the most current information and tools that are available.

### ***Build Knowledge and Skills***

Your users’ level of strategic staffing expertise will vary widely. Some experienced users may simply need an answer to a particular question or help with a particular part of the process (e.g., defining staffing requirements). Less experienced managers (e.g., those who are doing it for the first time) may have to learn about strategic staffing from the ground up and may need to be taken by the hand and led through the process of developing, interpreting, and implementing staffing strategies.

A well-designed web site will meet the learning needs of both of these groups (and everyone in between). By navigating an efficient series of menus, those who understand the process will be able to move quickly to locate the answer they need (or to find someone they can ask). Information (such as process descriptions) can be provided at varying levels of detail, allowing users to click and “drill down” to the level that they require. The site can also contain a search capability that allows users to pinpoint the exact sections of the site that contain the help they need. Those who need a better understanding of the process can learn about strategic staffing/workforce planning at their own pace by reading the text, following exam-

ples, playing with the templates, and interacting with strategic staffing experts. It is also possible to integrate into the site various training modules that provide a more formal, structured approach to learning.

### ***Increase Collaboration***

A message board on a strategic staffing web site can provide users with a forum for discussing strategic staffing issues, identifying common problems and concerns, and sharing best practices (whether internal or external). It can also provide a place to go when a manager needs to ask another manager for guidance (“What should I do?”), advice (“How did you solve this problem in the past?”), or opinions (“What do you think of this proposed solution?”). The site can also be used to identify staffing issues that are common to several business units and solutions that have proved to be particularly effective.

Intranet web sites can also prove valuable in the data collection process. Through such a site, users can exchange information and send in pieces that need to be compiled into a whole (e.g., they can submit staffing requirements for individual projects so that an overall definition of requirements can be developed). The web site can also serve as a forum for facilitating staffing actions, allowing managers to talk to one another regarding staffing needs and opportunities.

While this kind of communication is obviously available face to face within a limited group, use of the message board will allow managers and other users to cast a wider net. They can initiate and develop contacts with a much larger group of people—many more than they could possibly talk with on a one-on-one basis.

### ***Increase Implementation Efficiency***

If you have a specific process in place (or if you are implementing a process for the first time), a strategic staffing web site can make that process more efficient. The site can be used to describe the context and structure of the process to be implemented. It can provide users with all the forms, instructions, and staffing information that they need in order to complete their staffing strategies and plans. Users can also submit implementation-related questions and obtain answers quickly. The site can also be used as a centralized point for gathering and compiling staffing information from decentralized units and participants.

## **Designing Your Site**

First, create a web site (or add a series of pages to an existing site) that can be accessed easily and directly by all your proposed users. Make sure

that the site is secure, but don't let password protection impede access unnecessarily. If in doubt, err on the side of providing access to more people. Provide hyperlinks to the site from other internal human resource and business planning web sites and pages.

There is now a wealth of information regarding how an effective web site should be formatted and structured and what an effective site includes. There are individuals (whether consultants or company employees) who know far more about this than you do. Take full advantage of their expertise; don't try to design and build the site yourself.

When designing your web site, consider the following hints:

- Keep the site as simple as possible (or at least have it appear to be simple). A well-designed site can provide a lot of information in a way that never overwhelms the users.
- Build the site with users and customers in mind. What they need and want may differ from what you think they should have.
- Organize your site so that the various sections clearly and logically map to the specific needs of your users.

Design the menus so that it is easy for users to pinpoint the type of help they need and locate the module, section, or web page that contains just that help. Include each main point as a clickable option on your site's home page.

- Make sure that your opening/welcome screen is clean and inviting, not intimidating. Its design should encourage users to stay and dig deeper, not turn and flee.
- Use lots of pictures, diagrams, and other visuals. There are many figures in this book that explain and cement key concepts far better than my words do. Include diagrams and pictures such as those.
- Make it easy for users to print whatever information they think is helpful. Don't force them to print an entire section or page if what they need is contained in a single paragraph.
- Build the site so that it can be easily accessed and navigated, even if that makes it more difficult for you to maintain and update.
- Create ongoing processes for routine tests and site maintenance.

Finally, create and execute a plan to market your site to potential users. Do whatever is needed to create a "buzz" about the site and create a demand for its use, employing any and all media that you have access to. "Hype" the benefits that can be realized. Clearly describe how the site will help users to implement the strategic staffing/workforce planning

process more effectively. Merely communicating the existence of the site will generate little or no interest among users.

## Site Content and Objectives

### *Share Information*

On this section of the site, post all the information that users need in order to understand your strategic staffing process and how it works.

- **Overall strategic staffing concepts.** Define the objectives of strategic staffing and describe the context in which it works best. Provide diagrams (like the “upside-down T” shown in Chapter 2) that visually reinforce the points you are trying to make. Where necessary, also say what strategic staffing is not (e.g., describe the less effective, traditional approaches and why they should be avoided).

- **Generic process descriptions.** Describe, in general terms, the processes for developing longer-term staffing strategies and shorter-term staffing plans. Discuss the relationship between the two (i.e., that staffing strategies provide a long-term context within which more effective short-term staffing decisions can be made). Describe the components of the process and how they should be integrated. Provide diagrams to reinforce your descriptions.

- **Company-specific process descriptions.** Describe your actual strategic staffing process. Provide an overview or road map of the process itself. Discuss the various components of your process and how they fit together. Include diagrams that show the relationships among components. Some organizations have included detailed process diagrams; clicking on a component of the diagram brings up a more detailed view of that part of the process. Provide specific instructions for completing each step of the process. Describe roles and accountabilities. Talk about timing and describe links to other existing processes (such as business planning, budgeting, succession planning, and job posting). Where possible, provide hyperlinks to other areas of your intranet where those processes are described and supported.

- **Specific examples.** Provide specific examples of the process. Use actual numbers when describing staffing plans. Provide examples of typical outputs and expected deliverables.

### *Share Tools*

Provide users with direct access to the tools that they need in order to develop their own staffing strategies and plans. Specifically provide ver-

sions that practitioners can download, tailor, and use to meet their actual needs. This might include the following tools:

- **Spreadsheet templates.** Create generic versions of supply/demand staffing models that utilize existing, readily available spreadsheet software. Preload each model with all necessary calculation routines, formulas, and linkages so that users can simply adjust the number of rows and columns, load their data, and run their initial models. Don't forget to provide full instructions on how to use and update the spreadsheets.

- **Reusable examples.** Provide preformatted examples that users can easily edit (e.g., word processing tables containing draft staffing plans that completely describe required staffing actions). This will ensure that users' work is complete and well organized.

- **Your forms.** If your process requires the completion of forms or templates, provide them in a downloadable, ready-to-use format.

- **Data-gathering procedures.** If your process requires the submission of completed forms, provide users with the ability to submit their data directly through the site (eliminating paper transactions).

- **Suggested communications.** Provide samples of reports, analyses, presentations, and other communications that practitioners can tailor and use to describe the results of their processes to their constituencies.

- **Diagnostics and assessments.** Provide simple diagnostic tools and process assessments that allow your users to evaluate the effectiveness of their existing staffing strategies (including the processes they use to create those strategies) and identify opportunities to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their strategies. Examples of diagnostics and assessment tools are described in Chapters 12 and 13 of this book.

### ***Share Expertise***

Provide ready access to the strategic staffing knowledge base that has been built within your company. Provide a wide array of options, from canned responses to common questions to real-time, online coaching and consulting. You might do the following:

- **Organize by problem and structure walk-throughs.** In some cases (especially with new users), it will be difficult for people to even know where to begin the strategic staffing process. Use a simple form of expert system to help these individuals, providing a structured approach to identifying and resolving their issues. Here is a suggested process:

- Provide a list of common strategic staffing problems that managers in your organization face (e.g., a shortage of a particular skill or the

need to focus attention on a job category that is particularly critical). Have the user click on the problem that is most relevant.

- Have the site prompt the user to define key planning parameters for the selected issue (e.g., time frame, planning horizon, and population to be included).
- Present a series of pointed questions that helps users to define appropriate rows and columns for their staffing models.
- Based on the responses so far, have the site suggest to the user the data that will be needed to build the model that has been designed. Using a generic list, have the site suggest to the user where those needed data might be located.
- Link the user to the spreadsheet templates that are located elsewhere in the site. Describe how those sheets should be modified and loaded to support the analysis.
- Provide a list of possible outcomes (e.g., staffing gaps or staffing surpluses) and a list of staffing actions that might be relevant for each type of outcome.
- Provide a link to the templates (e.g., word processing tables) so users can document findings, conclusions, and proposed staffing plans.
- **Provide implementation guidance.** Provide specific advice that supports the effective implementation of the strategic staffing/workforce planning process. Describe what can be done to avoid pitfalls, work around obstacles, and minimize resistance to the implementation of the process. From a more positive perspective, describe what should be done to facilitate implementation. Many of these concepts are described in Chapters 11 and 12.
- **Provide access to an “e-coach.”** Allow users to interact with strategic staffing experts, either on a real-time/online basis or through e-mail. Identify people with strategic staffing expertise and provide users with direct links to those people. If e-mail links are used, you might even want to create specific Web addresses that allow users to gain expedited access to the experts without having to negotiate normal e-mail channels. Make sure that you measure response time and quality.
- **Provide message boards.** Create a strategic staffing message board that allows users to post questions, ask for advice from other users, or have interactive discussions regarding strategic staffing topics and issues.
- **Address frequently asked questions.** Provide a list of frequently asked questions and the answers to those questions.

### **Share Resources**

Provide direct links to other resources that support the development of staffing strategies.

- Often, there is a great deal of helpful information that already exists within the company. In your strategic staffing web site, provide direct access to such internal resources as:

- **Company data.** Describe relevant company databases and their content. Provide hyperlinks to the search engine of each database.
- **Related company systems.** Provide direct links to company systems that are related to, but different from, strategic staffing (e.g., job posting, succession planning).
- **Internal experts.** Provide a list of internal staff that can provide help in specific areas or answer particular questions. List the areas of expertise of each individual so that the user can quickly identify the most probable source for the needed information.
- **Available training and development.** Provide a list of internal training and development resources that a practitioner might use to gain a better understanding of strategic staffing (e.g., courses, computer/Web-based training).

- There is also a wealth of information available on the Web. Rather than try to provide such information in your own strategic staffing web site, simply provide hyperlinks to the sites where the needed information resides. That way, you won't need to maintain the information. Check your links frequently; Web addresses change often, and you don't want your users to become frustrated trying to access sites that have moved to new addresses. External resources might include:

- External databases (e.g., federal and state demographic databases, Internet job posting boards)
- Financial and economic forecasts
- Professional societies, both human resource and industry-specific (e.g., Society for Human Resource Management, Human Resource Planning Society)
- Providers of relevant workshops, seminars, and other training (e.g., AMACOM, World at Work, various university executive education programs)
- Online bookstores (e.g., AMACOM, Amazon, Barnes & Noble)
- Web sites of known external experts

You should also provide a search capability so your users can quickly locate the specific information or assistance that they are looking for.

One last suggestion: Include a direct link to a person that users can contact if they cannot find what they need or still have questions.

### **A Final Note**

As you read through this section, you may have noticed that the sections of the web site that I propose and the sections of this book match quite closely. That is no accident. The information that is provided to you in this book is the information that your users will need to support their strategic staffing efforts. Feel free to include some of the concepts and ideas described in this book as starting points for the various components of this site (although obviously you can't just copy this text!).

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