

UTILITY MANAGEMENT

Employee and Leadership Development

Recruit and Retain a Competent, Motivated Workforce

Quick Facts

- A large number of baby boomers will retire over the next decade. Succession planning is crucial
- Knowledge management provides a structure so that employee institutional knowledge is not lost over time
- Competency models are important tools for recruiting, training, evaluating, and rewarding employees

Overview

One of the ten attributes of effectively managed water utilities is employee and leadership development. To achieve effective leadership, a utility needs to recruit and maintain a workforce that is competent, motivated, adaptive, and safety-minded. Employee development focuses on retaining and improving institutional knowledge, establishing a participatory organization with emphasis on professional development, and creating a well-coordinated senior leadership team (EPA 2008).

Water utilities can determine where they currently stand in employee and leadership development by using the Benchmarking Tool developed in the WRF report, *Performance Benchmarking for Effectively Managed Water Utilities*. The tool identifies practices for recruiting

appropriate talent, retaining existing talent, addressing succession planning needs, and strengthening core competencies, as well as the performance measures associated with these practices (Matichich et al. 2014).

Succession Planning

A large number of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) will retire in the next decade. Planning recruitment strategies is essential to replace people with required competencies. *Succession Planning for A Vital Workforce in the Information Age* provides a workforce planning model, case studies, and a knowledge management toolkit to help utilities with retaining skills and knowledge, and recruiting competent replacements when employees leave the organization (Olstein et al. 2005).

A simple succession planning strategy could include a formalized plan to determine who has the knowledge, what knowledge would be lost and the attendant consequences, and what can be done to retain the information. (Figure 1) Knowledge retention tools can vary from in-person and virtual mentoring and storytelling to codified knowledge that can be retrieved through portals and search engines. A best practices approach can create a systematic, focused, and continuous application of knowledge in the organization (Blankenship et al. 2008).



the most effective actions. *Organizational Development and Knowledge Management for Water Utilities* features a quick assessment tool plus a virtual toolkit for planning and implementing the organizational changes necessary for a knowledge management strategy (Bennet and Bennet 2011).

Participatory and Collaborative Organizations: The Role of Knowledge Management

Knowledge is central to the success of drinking water utilities. It will become even more important as the future brings new technologies, consumer concerns, and catastrophic surprises. Effective knowledge management supports a participatory and collaborative organization, one that provides an empowering and learning-centric environment leading to efficiency, quality and sustainability. Knowledge management helps decision-makers take

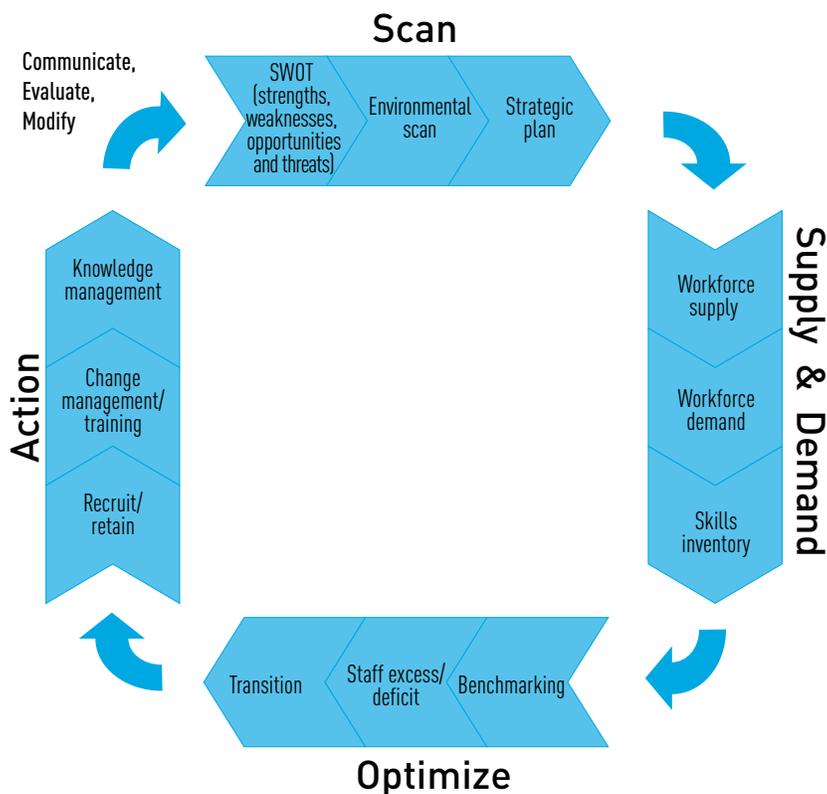
Recruiting, Training, and Retaining an Effective Workforce

Employee Life Cycle Management

In this leading human resources practice, an organization proactively manages the employee from hiring to the end of the relationship—keeping the employee engaged and committed to the organization’s success. A mini-assessment of workforce practices related to recruiting, training, and retaining employees is available on the CD-ROM accompanying *Workforce Planning for Water Utilities—Successful Recruiting, Training, and Retaining of Operators and Engineers* (Manning et al. 2008).

Competencies

A competency model is an important tool for recruiting and training. It describes behavioral indicators, skills and characteristics needed for effective and superior performance in a particular job or job family. Using such a model, utilities can select job candidates who already possess some of the competencies, or evaluate an employee’s competencies against a model to identify areas for training. Twelve sample competency models for 12 specific job positions (for example, Project Engineer, Foreman Crew Leader, Distribution System Operator) were developed as part of WRF’s report, *Competency Model Development and Application to Meet Water Utility Workforce Needs* (McTigue and Mansfield 2013). The



Source: Olstein et al. 2005

Figure 1. Workforce planning model



U.S. Department of Labor's "Competency Model Clearinghouse" provides additional background and a tool to help water utilities build a custom model for a specific job position.

Executive Leadership

Executive leadership is critical to water utilities' success. The WRF report, *Water Utility Executive Leadership for the 21st Century*, surveyed the drinking water community's executive ranks. General findings showed that demographically, the majority of CEOs were male, white, average age 54, highly educated, and most had functional responsibilities for services other than drinking water. In a ranking of leadership priorities of the ten attributes of effective utility management, CEOs rated water quality as the top priority, and employee leadership and development fell in the third tier of priorities. The project lays out the groundwork for improved training, recruitment, and promotion of water utility CEOs in the future (Teodoro 2013).

Leading Strategies

Recruitment

- School and university relationships
- Build positive name recognition with public
- New labor pools such as retirees
- Grow-your-own internal programs
- Search firms, employment agencies

Retention & Training

- Competitive pay
- Cultural awareness
- Apprenticeship programs
- Phased career retirements
- Real professional and personal development

Safety For Employees

High-hazard work in water utilities can involve energized electrical systems, elevated positions and hazardous chemicals. Special procedures and equipment used to perform tasks safely typically require additional resources in personnel, time and equipment. Failure to follow such procedures can result in severe injury or death. *Workforce Health and Safety: Prevention Through Design* introduces

new approaches to assess facilities and measure progress and cost in improving the safety of operations (Adams and Grieser 2014). 

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Last updated July 2016