



## Human Resource

### Optimising Human Resources

By Greg Kinnaird

Organisations must come up with solutions to meet the expectations of internal and external customers by offering high-quality products and services, with limited people resources. This article looks at the situation in Australia.

THE CURRENT labour shortage is being felt across the majority of industry sectors in Australia. It is interesting to consider that almost 10 years ago, most chief executives, managers, and leaders were faced with the challenge of how to responsibly and ethically reduce the number of employees due to restructuring, right-sizing, and down-sizing.

Today, they face an equally daunting challenge. Organisations must continue to meet the expectations of internal and external customers by offering high-quality products and services, with limited people resources.

Take for example the health sector, which seeks to provide high quality and affordable patient care in the face of current skilled staff shortage. This situation often leaves them with vacancies in many primary positions because they can't find enough of the right people to fill them.

On a daily basis, most industry leaders are facing associated issues arising from the tightness in the current labour market, like developing appropriate compensation and remuneration strategies to overcome a difficult problem for which there are few easy solutions.

Leaders also have an ethical and moral duty of care to ensure that vacancies within their organisations do not overburden existing staff with unacceptable workloads, and that customer service is not compromised.

Managers and leaders at the coal face need to develop workable action plans for delivering products and services.

Some strategies could include:

### **1. Tackle stress levels to reduce burnout**

It is important for workplace leaders to prevent burnout in employees who face extra work due to staff vacancies. It is imperative to develop a workplace culture of trust, teamwork, and commitment by providing opportunities for people to have input into problem solving and decision-making where appropriate.

### **2. Deal with management and development issues**

If your workforce is under pressure, it is crucial that the organisation develops a proactive strategy to attract and retain qualified people. The retention of current staff can be improved by improving flexibility through job enrichment activities to develop new skills sets. This can be done through formal and informal initiatives such as on the job training and off the job training, mentoring, coaching, and multi-skilling.

Professional leaders support and promote the use of cross functional project teams, embrace continuous improvement processes, and identify opportunities to provide fair and equitable remuneration and compensation packages. They also develop flexible scheduling of staff rosters and seek to provide people with the time and space needed for training and professional development activities.

### **2. Restructure to reduce workloads**

Organisations may need to consider delaying projects, closing business units, outsourcing functions, or diverting internal or external customers to other providers if skill shortages become more severe. Some international companies are looking at shifting functions and project work to their offices overseas.

### **3. Think strategically**

It may be useful to cultivate strategic alliances with similar businesses or service providers in your industry to reach a workable solution. Industry leaders should work together with schools, colleges, and universities to promote the benefits and challenges of career pathways in their industry, as a means of attracting potential

job candidates in future. Flexible graduate trainee programmes and career development initiatives are set to increase as companies seek creative and sustainable solutions. Industry bodies are also working with government on the areas of research, education, and skilled migration.

Remember that today's widening skills shortage may be a glimpse of the future, when the baby boomers retire and take their skills with them. Over 35 per cent of today's working population is over the age of 45 years.

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