

Building a viable, sustainable workforce at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)*



*connectedthinking

PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS 

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June 2008

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Understanding the Issues

One of the priority missions for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is preventing terrorists and terrorist's weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, from entering the United States. Other focuses of CBP, specifically the Border Patrol include, but are not limited to, interdicting illegal drugs and other contraband, apprehending persons entering the country illegally, enforcing immigration laws, and protecting U.S. agriculture from pests and diseases. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks heightened the need for increased border security, and as a result, President Bush called on CBP to dramatically increase its number of Border Patrol Agents. This effort remains ongoing and as more challenges are presented, the requirement to aggressively recruit, train, and retain more Border Patrol Agents remains a top priority.

Hiring and developing the right people with appropriate expertise is critical to maintaining an effective and sustainable workforce at CBP. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)'s strategy toward workforce planning represents a holistic approach that provides a framework for staffing decisions and resource allocations based on an organization's mission, strategic plan, resources and the workforce objectives. The approach is based on five primary steps, as presented below.

Step 1 – Define the Strategy, Goals, and Objectives

Step 2 – Document the Workforce Current State

Step 3 – Identify Leading Practices

Step 4 – Design the Workforce Future State

Step 5 – Develop an Implementation Plan

The remainder of this document defines each step in detail.

Step 1 – Define the Strategy, Goals, and Objectives

A shared human capital vision among the agency's leaders and other key stakeholders is a critical success factor in any workforce planning activity.

- PwC recommends that CBP establish and document a vision and engage key leaders and stakeholders in developing the workforce planning strategy. In developing the vision, it is important that CBP consider:
 - Organization mission
 - Budget and resources available
 - Leadership commitment necessary to successfully implement the change
- The scope of the initiative should be documented, and a communications plan developed to guide current and future workforce planning activities. Initial communication surrounding the strategy, goals and objectives of an initiative is crucial for gaining buy in and support. Because of this, PwC recommends framing the presentation of the vision statement with the following elements:
 - An explanation of the organization's short-term and long-term goals and objectives
 - Details on what needs to be done now and how the organization will benefit in the future
 - A projection of the talent pool needed to meet the stated goals

- An invitation/challenge to the current workforce to become an effective key player in the change about to occur
- The establishment of an open door policy to ask questions and provide suggestions

The outcome of this step is a consistent, compelling, and motivating human capital vision. The vision will benefit the organization through providing the necessary drive for change in the right direction and mobilizing the right people needed to make this change successful.

Step 2 – Document the Workforce Current State

In order to effectively set accurate expectations for the future, CBP must be able to identify its current strengths and weaknesses. Executing the activities required to transform into a high-performing organization is a two-phased process.

- In the first phase, the organization needs an independent assessment and current inventory of processes, systems and the jobs that require a mastery level of competency to use these systems. Performing a thorough independent assessment of the current "as-is" workforce environment is a critical first step for all process improvement initiatives. It is vitally important to understand the root-causes of any current process inefficiencies or bottlenecks. Commonly surveyed characteristics and capability indicators include:
 - Workforce composition (to include grade level; age; ratio of civil servants to contractors, etc.)
 - Roles & responsibilities
 - Skills inventory
 - Competency assessment
 - Job dependency on system utilized
 - Mastery level required on systems
 - Workforce development opportunities
 - Workload analysis

CBP should assess the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) and competency requirements of current staff within the organization and compare to attrition statistics, isolating key trends, gaps, or other findings that impact agency performance. A general workforce population that possess a lack of the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to do a job effectively can hinder CBP's capacity to distribute workload and complete tasks in an efficient manner.

In order to determine the appropriate alignment of workforce to workload, the current workforce composition, and individual competency levels must be considered and analyzed. When conducting a workload analysis, ask the following questions of each individual job role:

- What are the skills needed to accomplish this job?
- What is the level of expertise needed for this role?
- Is this position mission critical?
- Does this role require cross functional job capabilities?
- Is there a shortage of this role?

- What is the turnover rate for this role?
- In the second phase, CBP should apply and analyze the collective findings from the Current State Assessment to identify and agree upon opportunities for improvements. Types of opportunities for improvement might include:
 - Redesigning processes to take advantage of automation opportunities
 - Determining the job level and type of personnel required for managing some of the systems and processes in place
 - Analyzing job roles to determine if a cross functional role can be created to fill an existing gap
 - Examining job descriptions and adjusting to reflect the level of expertise needed in these positions

By conducting an objective assessment of current staff resources to determine where there are gaps in the KSAs and competencies needed now and in the future, CBP will gain a better understanding of the current workforce, role and competency requirements, identified areas for improvement, and workforce needs. This understanding will benefit CBP through allowing the organization to develop workforce objectives that align with the organization's mission, portraying a realistic and obtainable vision for the future. It will also afford the organization with an opportunity to identify the best methods and time frames to fill known gaps and incorporate these methods into the overall strategy.

Step 3 – Identify Leading Practices

PwC recommends that CBP conduct a Leading Practices Study to determine how high performing public and/or private sector organizations have optimized their workforce to fulfill mission requirements. Many times, a talent drought in a particular area of expertise affects multiple agencies. Keeping in mind the agency's mission, consider the current workforce and project with as much detail as possible, as well as the type of talent pool the agency will need to meet future goals and objectives.

- PwC suggests that CBP interview key representatives from agencies with a similar organizational structure, business operations, and overall human capital strategy in order to identify transferable tactics and approaches for identifying and acquiring the "right workforce".
- CBP should review leading practices to determine how other organizations are acquiring talent in the same areas and consider asking the following questions:
 - What is the organization's recruitment strategy?
 - How does the organization consider the external factors that impact its workforce now and in the future?
 - What is the organization's approach to mitigate turnover?
 - What has the organization done to ensure that training and development opportunities are linked to workforce needs?
 - What type of performance management programs does the organization have in place to facilitate retention? (e.g., training, mentoring, coaching, recruitment, succession planning)
- Leading practices and studies should be incorporated into the overall strategy as theories and systems can be re-engineered to meet CBP's needs.

At the end of this step, CBP will be able to validate or suggest changes to current approaches, identify approaches that have worked well, and identify the pitfalls experienced by other organizations. This information will allow CBP to benefit from others' experiences to take advantage of tactics that have worked for others and avoid those that were not successful.

Step 4 – Design the Workforce Future State

As organizational gaps are identified, it is important to address how the organization plans to fill those gaps. Once the organizational framework for maintaining optimal workforce performance is established, CBP should begin to question how the right workforce will be put into place. Key questions will include:

- What is our specific plan for moving forward?
- Where should we get the talent needed?
- How will we know if we are making progress—what type of metrics and tools will we use to monitor progress?
- What should we do if we are not making progress fast enough?

Applying the collective findings from Steps 2 and 3, PwC recommends that CBP design a blueprint of the future high performing agency. To develop this blueprint, PwC recommends that CBP conduct individual competency assessments against standard competency models to identify key skills gaps. CBP should assess the comparative advantages of addressing gaps through the following activities:

- Developing new competency models and job descriptions
- Training, mentoring, and coaching
- Recruitment
- Succession planning

The completed blueprint should outline a workforce approach to meet short- and long-term mission requirements. Buy-in from upper management to validate the accuracy of this blue print is essential, as is stakeholder communications.

- CBP will need to determine who needs to be informed of the blueprint and at what level. The organization must develop a good communications plan.
- A communications plan will need to be developed to provide the ability to track communication activities regarding the mission, current state, future state and how this will be accomplished.
- The communications plan should consider the purpose of the message, content, sender, who is receiving the message, delivery method and timing.

This is a unique step in the process because it produces two outputs. As the design of the future workforce state is established, discussions around how to effectively get there will emerge. Utilizing the current workforce assessment result analysis, documentation, and outside research for the future state will not only be determined, but CBP should be able to provide a description of the ideal workforce and proposed steps needed to accomplish future state goals. Each of these elements will populate the implementation plan.

Step 5 – Develop an Implementation Plan

CBP faces a common challenge experienced by many Federal agencies: the ability to get the right people with the right skills into the right jobs at the right time. To overcome this challenge and achieve its human capital vision, PwC recommends that CBP develop a systematically designed workforce implementation plan. The plan should outline the tactical steps for implementing the new workforce plan blueprint including steps to implement desired changes to competency models, job descriptions, training activities, succession plans, or other performance management initiatives.

The plan should also develop a strategy for the organization to acquire the talent it needs to fill gaps over the short-term and long-term, based on a thorough examination of potential workforce solutions such as restructuring the organization and roles and responsibilities, leveraging technology, retraining current staff; focused hiring of experienced staff, "growing" talent through intern or career ladder programs, and contracting some work to other organizations (inside the department, other government departments, or the private sector).

The specific steps to conducting a solid implementation plan are as follows:

- Review documentation (job descriptions, training activities, competency models, etc) and conduct structured interviews with key organizational personnel. This will provide an accurate inventory of existing personnel, information systems, key supporting business processes and the competencies that correlate with each job.
- Identify current initiatives in training, succession planning and/or performance management and identify gaps
- Identify and prioritize findings
- Develop a Workforce Plan vision
- Document and communicate findings in a Current State Report
- Research Leading Practices and interview organizations that have experienced successes in Workforce Planning transformation
- Develop an Opportunities for Improvement document that outlines agreed upon recommendations for the next steps to be taken
- Begin to develop a Future State Report by incorporating a timetable to implement the strategy and identifying short and long-term goals and designate metrics by which to measure progress

Development of a comprehensive and realistic implementation plan will guide the organization to overcome identified deficiencies and meet human capital objectives. Workforce planning initiatives can place stress on the workforce for a variety of reasons. As such, PwC recommends that agency leaders develop a communications plan to clearly articulate the business drivers for the initiative as well as the anticipated benefits. The involvement of key stakeholders is critical throughout the initiative to ensure strong and consistent change management.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of hiring and developing the right people with appropriate expertise is to continue to build an effective and sustainable workforce at CBP. PwC's strategy toward workforce planning will provide a framework for CBP to best align their staffing decisions and resource allocations with their organization's mission, strategic plan, resources and the workforce objectives.

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