

The Future of Work – So Where’s the Talent?

By Kathi Crawford, SPHR, MCC (IAC) | January 2013

A tsunami of change has washed over the world of work, and many businesses as well as job seekers and labor force members, are still playing catch up to the waves that have already swept through. Technology is a major driver continuing to create rapid and profound changes in both the way business is conducted and the skill sets needed for the workforce to effectively do their jobs.



Globalization, increased automation, social media and working in “the cloud” to name a few, are all the results of technological innovations. The way in which we work is different and this has impacted businesses both large and small in every industry ranging from manufacturing and financial services to retail and catering.

The Skills Gap and Talent Shortages

It’s no secret the unemployment numbers have been a serious concern in the U.S. since 2007. However, you might be surprised to know there are currently millions of job openings in America. Why? The latest research from the [2012 Manpower Talent Shortage Survey](#) ↗ reports there simply are not enough qualified workers to fill the demand. As the economy continues to recover, this problem will become even more severe.

The issue has made headlines and not just in the talent management press. 60 Minutes is only one media outlet that recently aired such a

story with their segment, “Three million open jobs in the U.S., but who’s qualified?” ➔ Their focus was on the manufacturing sector where there are more than 500,000 unfilled jobs. One of the unintended consequences of new technology is that while companies have capitalized on the latest “smart machines,” they are unable to realize profits or expand production due to a shortage of skilled labor. After all, the machines can’t operate themselves but the problem is by no means confined to manufacturing.

With high unemployment numbers, it’s obvious the immediate problem is not the number of potential candidates. While the buzz is that there is a talent shortage, perhaps a better way of stating it is a “talent mismatch.” Employers are seeking ever more specific skill sets and combinations of skills—not just technical capabilities alone but perhaps in combination with critical thinking skills or other qualities that will help drive the organization forward. As a result, the “right” person for a particular job is becoming much harder to find. Talent is elusive as the statistics show in the [2010 Manpower White Paper: Teachable Fit – A New Approach for Easing the Talent Mismatch](#) ➔. Even for businesses who find the “right” talent, there is the issue of “jumpers,” those who will readily move on to the next best available offer.

The lack of qualified talent is across the board and not confined to only highly skilled occupations. Adding fuel to the fire is the large number of Baby Boomers who are exiting the workforce and an educational system not producing what the market needs. All the while, there are millions of workers who are unemployed or underemployed, even degreed professionals, who are unable to contribute due to a lack of job-ready skills. Gen X and Gen Y (also known as the Millennials) have been particularly hard hit. The players are changing and so is the music.

Reality Check: How the “Square Peg” Recruitment Strategy Limits – Everything

While there may indeed be a lack of available talent, the traditional recruitment process is playing a critical role detrimental to business as well as the economy. Reality begins with the recognition that conventional methods – once considered the cutting edge of talent management – are simply not working anymore as a response to the broader challenges ahead.

Companies are missing the mark in attempts to find exceptional workers. The screening practices require online applications forcing job seekers to check “yes” for every box on the employer’s wish list. If these boxes are not checked – the job seeker does not even make it to the interview process. When the square peg (candidate) does not exactly fit in the round hole (skill set), employers are missing out on a vast amount of potential talent. The practice of just going on to the next peg not only causes missed opportunities to find great employees but is also a waste of valuable company resources.

A secondary issue is the candidate who looks perfect on paper – but not so much when placed in the real world. The best hires must also bring a set of attitudes, behaviors and commitment for success. The value of these soft skills and desire to do the work (beyond the hard skills) is what creates a win-win where both the company and employees can thrive in a sustainable manner.

Beyond Limits – Finding the Right Box

So, how can we expand our qualified talent pool? To close the gap between business needs and the abilities of candidates and employees, employers must first recalibrate their mindsets and broaden their talent management strategy. This is especially true for systemic shortages of in-demand roles.

The new reality demands employers consider some training and development will be a necessary investment. Small to medium-sized businesses in particular are reluctant to put resources into training without knowing their ROI. To address these concerns, a change in the recruitment practice is called for. To find the “right” person for the “right” box, employers should first consider candidates who are a fit for their organizational culture, have a desire to do the work and are able to build and sustain relationships up, down and across the organization. These candidates may not have ALL the specific hard skills a job requires but have the foundational attitudes and behaviors and a willingness and aptitude for learning.

Positive things happen if an employer is open enough to accept this ... “I might not get the exact match on the skill set. Here’s what I can teach them [fill in the blanks]. If I can get the right match on these other things

Top Ten Skills for the Future

1 Sense Making – Ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed

2 Social Intelligence – Ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way, to sense and stimulate desired reactions and interactions

3 Novel & Adaptive Thinking – Proficiency and coming up with solutions and responses beyond that which is rule-based

4 Cross Cultural Competency – Ability to operate in different cultural settings

5 Computational Thinking – Ability to translate vast amounts of data into abstract concepts and to understand data-based reasoning

6 New-Media Literacy – Ability to critically access and develop that uses new media forms, and to leverage these media for persuasive communications

7 Transdisciplinarity – Literacy in and ability to understand concepts across multiple disciplines

8 Design Mindset – Ability to represent and develop tasks and work processes for desired outcomes

9 Cognitive Load Management – Ability to discriminate and filter information for importance, and to understand how to maximize cognitive function using a variety of tools and techniques

10 Virtual Collaboration – Ability to work productively, drive engagement and demonstrate presence as a member of a virtual team

Source: Future Work Skills 2020, Apollo Research Institute 

and I know they really want to be here, then I can really have something to work with long-term and therefore am ready to make the investment and commitment.” They know ... “This person can grow with us, let’s plant them.”

To close the gap between business needs and the abilities of candidates and employees, employers need to ask four questions:

- 1. Which capabilities are essential to performing the job?**
Employers must refine job descriptions and candidate evaluations to identify people with a “teachable fit” based on adjacent skills rather than a traditional fit. Candidates can also be considered for multiple jobs to maximize recruitment resources.
- 2. Which of these are teachable in an efficient way?** A commitment to onboarding, reinforcement for performance (answer the question – “How am I doing?”), and ongoing training and development is central to building a sustainable talent strategy.
- 3. Is there adequate time and money to develop these capabilities in the candidate?** A strategic plan ensures your talent pipeline is keeping up with your internal demands for talent and leadership, thereby building in time needed to develop capability.
- 4. Do candidates have the capacity (motivation, capability, commitment) to develop?** Knowledge and skills are teachable, but not necessarily attitudes and behaviors. People come with those. How do you know what those are before you hire someone? How do you make sure someone is a fit long-term, the job is what they really want and are going to be committed and excited about?

A Call for Action

How would you rate your current Talent Strategy? Are you a growing organization? Do you struggle with attracting candidates and/or employee retention? If so, you need to complete a Talent Strategy Assessment. Contact me at kcrawford@PeoplePossibilities.com ↻ to learn how People Possibilities can assist you.

↻ 2012 Manpower Talent Shortage Survey – <http://www.manpowergroup.us/campaigns/talent-shortage-2012/> |
↻ Three million open jobs in the U.S., but who’s qualified? – <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch?id=50134943n> |
↻ 2010 Manpower White Paper: Teachable Fit – A New Approach for Easing the Talent Mismatch – https://www.manpower.com.au/documents/White-Papers/2010_Teachable-Fit-Framework.pdf

Be more.

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