Future scenarios analysis

The aim of future state conversations is to help understand anticipated workforce requirements over the short, medium and long term in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. In this way it recognises that although the future is uncertain the organisation can develop a set of plausible alternative futures and foreshadow how they may plan for such a future. It is a different approach to trying to pinpoint the exact future. It also recognises that having a clear understanding of the immediate activities needed in the next few years is important, but it is also important to be bold and courageous in planning for the longer term and tackling wicked problems. The catch is that the more precise an organisation attempts to be in predicting and planning for the future, the greater the risk if that future doesn’t happen. Because of this uncertainty, organisations often seek to build capability and attributes relevant across different jobs and work settings, such as learning agility, flexibility and systems thinking.

It may be useful to think of scenarios as a way of shedding light on the future within certain boundaries. The actual future might be expected to fall somewhere within those bounds.

Questions that may be helpful include:

Future business changes:
- what are the strategic imperatives?
- what changes are anticipated over the next three to ten years which will impact on the workforce?
- what changes to service delivery do you anticipate over the next three to ten years?
- how will these changes take effect (what will we need more of, less of, deploy etc)?
- how can we take advantage of the future context?
- what assumptions can we make?
Scenario discussions:
- what are the likely scenarios for the organisation in the future? (three or four)
  - what is the likelihood of occurrence?
  - What are the key events and timing?
- are there any common elements or emerging themes (eg service delivery models, use of technology)?
- how will each scenario impact on the workforce?:
  - minimal - maintain current capability and resourcing
  - somewhat - change current resourcing and capability requirements
  - significant - major resourcing and capability changes required
- consider for each scenario:-
  - to what extent will the organisation be different from now?
  - what needs to change with our systems and processes?
  - how will the workplace and workforce need to be designed?
- how will we best address the changes identified:-
  - what capabilities and talent will we need to introduce (buy and borrow)?
  - what capabilities and talent must we develop further (build)?
  - to what extent will there be a scarcity or surplus of talent in the internal and external labour market?

Data requirements in preparation for scenario planning sessions:
- what roles are currently critical to the business unit’s ability to meet strategic and operational goals?
- what is the outlook for your external labour market?
- what are the current capability strengths?
- what are the current service delivery models?
- what are the current workforce demographics?
Scenario planning and workforce supply and demand modelling go hand in hand given the similar challenges in variability and influencers. For example, it is difficult to predict with any certainty the number of customer service staff who will be needed in the future as it will depend on uptake of digital solutions, population mobility and service delivery models. One way to think about supply and demand is that it is about balancing inputs with outputs. The below figure shows an example of some of these variables.

Not all of these variables will affect each agency in the same way – if at all. For workforce planners very often the answer to the question ‘what will we look like in the future’ is…… ‘it depends’.