

Statistical excellence through capability development and planning – reflections on experience

Submitted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) strategic business and planning framework is being refreshed to position the organisation to meet and anticipate future challenges and to ensure sustainability. In particular, the ABS is moving towards closer linkages between business, planning and workforce strategies.

2. These strategic directions entail implementation of new initiatives, since the presentation of the paper '*Statistical Excellence through capability development and planning – ABS Organisational People and Learning System*' ECE/CES/2006/22 at the June 2006 conference.

3. This paper introduces these initiatives and reflects on experiences to date on achieving sustained organisational performance and accountability through the development of a capable workforce.

II. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING CAPABILITY

4. The ABS Corporate Plan sets out a vision for the organisation and articulates objectives and strategies to achieve this vision. One of the key objectives in the Corporate Plan is a commitment by the ABS to build the capability of its people. ABS Strategic Directions which relate directly to building capability, include:

- Building and maintaining an adequate resource base to support our core work program; and
- Developing a set of scenarios with regard to the office structure of the ABS, including: a work design; how best to secure our future workforce; and the implications of supporting and expanding the national statistical service.

5. In order to make this happen, the ABS has examined the demand and supply side issues of workforce planning. The gaps between the current and desired workforce form the basis of the ABS Workforce Plan. The Workforce Plan sets the direction for developing future people management capability and is designed to guide workforce attraction, engagement and retention policy and planning over a four year period.

6. It is our vision that:

“By 2012, the ABS will have developed a better understanding of its workforce profile and will be actively using this information to guide decision-making. Workforce planning will be aligned with the organisation’s strategic planning activities.”

7. Human resource efforts will be directed towards three priority goals, underpinned by a number of strategies. The ABS will focus on a small number of high-level strategies, some of which are new and others that build on existing initiatives. Details of the objectives the ABS are aiming to achieve are in section V of this paper. The three ABS workforce goals are:

Goal 1: Ensure the ABS workforce remains skilled and competent

8. Deploying a highly skilled and staffed workforce plays an essential role in ensuring the ABS has the capability to meet current and future demands. In order to staff the right number of people in the right places at the right time, the ABS must firstly, understand and secondly, become responsive to changes in its staffing profile.

Goal 2: Align workforce planning with other ABS planning activities

9. Link workforce planning activities with the agencies financial and business planning activities at different levels within the ABS to ensure it has the capacity to more effectively understand and project its business requirements. The ABS requires access to replicable and reliable data for effective analysis of its workforce.

Goal 3: Realign ABS systems and processes.

10. Support for the realignment of some operational HR functions will require considerable investment by the ABS. The ABS must focus on bringing its current systems into closer alignment with its business priorities and/or continue to look for efficiencies in improved operations.

III. REFLECTIONS FROM EXPERIENCES TO DATE

11. The ABS informed the 2006 Conference of initiatives in developing an organisational capability framework, tools to bring the framework to life as well as formal and informal learning activities linked to developing capability. This section reflects on key experiences with some of these initiatives.

A. ABS Capability Framework

12. The ABS has developed and implemented a capability framework that defines the skills, capabilities and knowledge required of employees to achieve the organisations' work program. The Organisational People and Learning System (OPALS) allows individuals to link their development needs with learning opportunities. The system has been designed to encourage employees and their managers to gain a shared understanding and agreement on critical learning areas. It also enables career planning by allowing employees to explore capability requirements for roles other than their own.

13. Core capabilities identified in the ABS are:
- a) People and Communication
 - b) Achieving Results
 - c) Thinking
 - d) Understanding the Business of Statistics
 - e) Understanding the ABS Environment

a) People and Communication

This capability details the required level of knowledge, skills and abilities associated with such concepts as interpersonal communication, negotiation, written communication, leadership, teamwork, people management, employee development, professionalism and development of internal and external client relationships.

b) Achieving Results

This capability includes project management, corporate governance, meeting deadlines, adjusting to change, task prioritisation and completion, time management, appropriate meeting behaviours, sharing planning between strategic and operational tasks.

c) Thinking

This capability groups a wide range of thinking skills and behaviour including conceptual thinking, analytical thinking, strategic thinking, research ability, decision making skills, professional judgement, problem solving and application of theory to practice.

d) Understanding the Business of Statistics

Behaviours associated with this capability would include basic statistical cycle knowledge, general awareness of ABS statistical business and knowledge of basic statistical principles, tools and methods.

e) Understanding the ABS Environment

Behaviours associated with this capability would include corporate knowledge and awareness, ability to operate effectively within the ABS technical environment and alignment of work behaviours with APS and ABS values.

14. Job-specific capabilities identified in the ABS, which align with the statistical cycle, are:

- a) Stakeholder Engagement
- b) Statistical Planning
- c) Methodology
- d) Collection Development
- e) Data Collection
- f) Processing
- g) Data Analysis
- h) Dissemination
- i) Decision Support
- j) Managing Quality and Processes

a) Stakeholder Engagement

This capability relates to identifying information needs and understanding the broad context in which information is required.

b) Statistical Planning

This capability relates to assessing information needs, how these needs can be addressed and how decisions made at different parts of the process flow through.

c) Methodology

This capability relates to using information and decisions made during Statistical Planning to finalise a collection. Where appropriate, this includes assessing methodological parameters, designing and allocating a sample, and non-sampling considerations such as frames, editing and imputation.

d) Collection Development

This is the link between methodology and the implementation of samples, collections and forms.

e) Data Collection

This is the process of bringing data into the ABS. It includes collecting information as well as accessing administrative data sources.

f) Processing

This involves getting the data into a more useable form. This includes estimation, editing, imputation, sample maintenance and frame maintenance.

g) Data Analysis

This includes analytical techniques such as summarising, exploring and identifying issues; reconciliation/validation with other sources; interpretation of concepts, data sources and methods; and where appropriate using analytical techniques which require application of theory, such as modelling, time series and demographic techniques.

h) Dissemination

This involves turning the data into information, which may include: tables, graphs and publications; providing a framework in which data is collected; or application of time series.

i) Decision Support

This involves evaluating statistical collections and outputs to determine if they have met information needs.

j) Managing Quality and Processes

This relates to managing those processes which impact throughout every stage of the statistical cycle and ensuring objectives are met, including data management and application of the data quality framework.

15. This framework has been important to the ABS starting to understand its capability at an organisational and individual level, in providing a common language with which to discuss workforce capability and in linking staff to appropriate training.

16. Like any new framework or system, there are issues and gaps identified over time.

17. Since implementation of the ABS Capability Framework, the Australian Public Service Commission has updated its leadership capabilities (Integrated Leadership System) to include behaviours associated with each capability. The ABS expects to review and update its capability framework in 2009-10 to align with these changes.

18. The ABS has recognised a need for a more structured approach to identifying, developing and managing future leaders. It is problematic to identify future leaders

using the core and job-specific capabilities in the current framework. A Framework for Future Leaders has been scoped and it is expected that implementation of this initiative will commence in early 2009-10.

B. ABS Performance Agreements

19. Improved organisational capability is linked to improved organisational performance. Recognising this, the ABS' performance agreement templates have been revised quite radically. The emphasis is on 'how' individuals deliver and what 'value-add' they bring to their work and place in their team, rather than on 'what' each person does. A section articulating each person's career plans and development requirements is also included.

20. Over time, it is anticipated that increased clarity on individual development requirements will result in improved understanding of organisational training and development needs.

C. Information Gaps

21. Development of the Workforce Plan and use of the current systems that support Human Resources have highlighted a need for improved and aligned reporting facilities. Most importantly, the integration of business, workforce, financial and service planning, must be improved to facilitate the development of a more holistic model. Better quality and more easily accessed HR and financial information will better inform ABS decision-making into the future.

22. In the context of reporting on organisational capabilities, what is missing is a clear reporting link between the demand for specific training and the related capabilities/skills. Users of the support systems can readily access a capability and then link to the relevant training. However, reverse access is not currently possible. Broad capability requirements can be assessed, but specific skills are not necessarily articulated or linked to training, so gaps are not easily measured. This issue is expected to feed into the review of the capability framework.

IV. CONCLUSION

23. In summary, establishing the connection between traditional people-related metrics and broader business drivers is fundamental to any workforce plan. Much of the ABS' future success in understanding the impact business decisions have on workforce compositions will rest with its ability to mesh current and future people needs and costs. This data is currently held in disparate, unconnected systems. Linking business planning, finance and people metrics should provide the ABS with a much better understanding of its workforce composition, related costing and future requirements.

24. The preliminary workforce planning initiatives have highlighted some significant challenges facing the ABS. These include, acquiring staff with the right skills,

capabilities and experience consistent with its current and future workforce needs. To meet this requirement beyond 2008, the ABS must develop a better understanding of its current skill/capability mix, along with the ability to forecast (through identified performance indicators) future workplace needs. Key priority areas include:

- Taking a strategic view of the future of our nine offices;
- Understanding our workforce composition and leveraging off this to consider how to work differently in the future;
- Accessing workforce information that is accurate and reliable;
- Further developing activities/strategies to ensure the ABS maintains its “employer of choice” position with employee groups that meet its skill profile;
- Developing a workforce planning “tool kit” and education programme designed to assist cost centres/branches with the concept of workforce planning;
- Implementing a succession planning framework to manage “critical positions” with the agency; and
- Identifying, developing and managing future ABS leaders.

25. The refreshed strategic business and planning framework is expected to drive productivity improvements over the next few years. Current and new initiatives outlined in this paper are expected to build individual capability and improve ABS understanding and harnessing of its organisational capability.

V. ACHIEVING OUR OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Ensuring the ABS remains skilled and competent

Priority Area	Strategies	Deliverables
<i>Understanding our workforce composition</i>	Identify the ABS skill base.	Identification and agreement on ABS job families.
	Use job families to guide ongoing attraction activities within the agency.	An approach for matching people with positions to meet the ABS current and future demand.
	Expand Business Process Mapping activities to identify productivity gains.	Guidelines for the redesign of identified positions within the agency.
<i>Attracting talented people</i>	Explore alternative employment markets (both nationally and internationally).	Expansion of current recruitment activities to aid in the attraction of a wider pool of talented people.
	Develop approaches to target diverse employee groups	A paper to management on the success of different approaches in attraction.
	Work with Corporate Communications to enhance the reputation of the ABS externally.	A paper to management on marketing strategies that will enhance the reputation of the ABS externally.
	Develop a framework to ensure remuneration is competitive.	Assist in attracting and retaining high-quality employees.
<i>Retaining and engaging high performing staff</i>	Develop strategies to promote existing, flexible work practices.	Encourages valuable employees to remain with the ABS.
	Promote the link between performance and employee development.	Performance agreements and discussions are linked to learning and development.
	Develop a national reward and recognition programme that recognises employee performance in reaching ABS goals.	Implementation of a consistent approach to reward and recognition throughout the ABS.
	Develop a robust and flexible workplace induction/orientation programme that informs and engages staff on ABS goals/behaviours.	An induction model that engages people with the goals and behaviours of the ABS.
<i>Succession planning for the future</i>	Use ABS age profile and senior management consultation to identify 'critical' positions within the agency.	Implement formal succession plans for critical positions throughout the agency.
<i>Developing talent – ABS future leaders</i>	Prepare strategies on talent development within the ABS from paper the <i>Framework for Leader development</i> .	Implementation of programmes/activities designed to identify/foster talented people within the ABS.

Goal 2: Align workforce planning with other ABS planning activities

Priority Area	Strategies	Deliverables
<i>Using HR indicators to guide decision-making</i>	Identify and report on high-level HR indicators.	Regular HR reports against key indicators which can be used to guide people management decisions and attraction strategies with the ABS.
	Identify and report on recruitment targets - assessing the ABS' market position and value for money in advertising.	Regular HR reports against key 'vacancy' indicators which can be used to guide people management decisions and attraction strategies with the ABS.
<i>Align workforce planning with corporate planning activities.</i>	Liaise with finance and business planning to ensure people indicators are included in the ABS' future Integrated Business Planning model.	Workforce planning steps included in corporate governance activities. A workforce planning model that links people, financial and business planning activities.
<i>Devolving workforce planning to cost centre/branch levels</i>	Engage stakeholders in the development of localised workforce planning frameworks to ensure understanding of their people needs.	A workforce planning model that links people, financial and business planning activities. Will assist with regional/branch planning activities and will lead to a better inform corporate planning process.
	Develop and implement a workforce planning toolkit.	A co-ordinated approach to workforce planning in the ABS.

Goal 3: Realign ABS systems and processes

Priority Area	Strategies	Deliverables
<i>Re-engineering recruitment operational activities</i>	Implement e-Recruitment technology.	Minimisation of manual processing and human error.
	Engage stakeholders around consistent recruitment principles.	Co-ordinated approach to recruitment activities to minimise gaps and duplication.
<i>Ensuring ABS has the correct infrastructure in place to manage for the future</i>	Develop end to end system to cover the ABS business process.	Realignment of ABS systems, people and processes.