RESEARCH NOTE
AIR FORCE USES COGNOS TO MANAGE PERSONNEL AND IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

THE BOTTOM LINE

Companies that have not extended business intelligence and performance management to their human resources department should consider doing so. The Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI) uses Cognos 8 Business Intelligence to get better visibility into the deployment of its workforce, manage personnel, and improve productivity.

Business intelligence and performance management are typically thought of as tools for the marketing, finance, and sales departments. However, this may be underestimating the value of these tools, since human resources departments tend to have lots of data but not enough ways to analyze it. Because payroll tends to be the largest line item on a company's income statement, companies looking for a way to improve their bottom line should consider using business intelligence to enable human resources to better manage and deploy staff.

Human resources management now

Many companies are using relatively old-fashioned tools and practices when they analyze how they are utilizing their staff. Analyses and reports have typically been built from the ground up over the years, are Microsoft Excel-based, and lack standardization. A decreasing, but not insignificant, number of organizations are using paper-based systems. Often, human resources staff and managers don't know where HR-related data is or how to access it. Although there are plenty of human resources management solutions on the market, they tend to focus on the growing administrative mandate of human resources departments; benefits administration, legal compliance, and recruiting. This adds up to lots of people manually building staffing-related reports that may be incomplete and possibly interpreted differently by its consumers. More importantly, it results in a lack of visibility about how an organization is utilizing employees, its most valuable and costly asset.

AFOSI — the investigative arm of the United States Air Force — uses Cognos 8 to avoid new hires and improve productivity and is a good example of how human resources departments can benefit from business intelligence.

What human resources management should look like

AFOSI supports the Air Force and Department of Defense by performing criminal investigations and providing data in various forms. The organization's mandate has been increasing as a result of the global war on terrorism. The Cognos deployment at AFOSI is integrated with databases that store data about

employees, investigations, crime levels, case closure statistics, and bases where AFOSI employees are assigned. This integration is used to generate a broad variety of reports that enable the organization to shorten inquiry response times, improve investigator supervision, and gain visibility about where AFOSI investigators are deployed.

Benefits of extending business intelligence to human resources

Using business intelligence to strategically manage human resource issues has enabled the AFOSI to effectively assign personnel and improve productivity. Specific benefits of these applications of business intelligence include:

- Improved personnel placement. AFOSI staff is using Cognos 8 to generate reports that compare the levels of crime, rates of investigation closure, and number of investigative agents at each base. Based on these reports, investigative staff has been reassigned and investigative teams combined, enabling existing AFOSI staff to meet the organization's expanding mission.

- Improved investigator productivity. By using Cognos 8 reports to track factors such as the skill sets, caseloads, and closure rates of each investigator, AFOSI has been able to improve the productivity and effectiveness of its investigators. One AFOSI manager said, *"Investigative agents have become more productive because they know they are being scored regularly. If we notice that the close rate is too low at a particular investigative unit, we check it out and maybe give them training or a different assignment. We have 1,900 agents at 210 units, and they are now about 10 percent more productive."*

- Improved analyst productivity. An important function for non-investigative staff at AFOSI staff is to answer inquiries from the Department of Defense, Congress, and various military commanders. Cognos ad-hoc reporting features, which are more robust in Cognos 8, have made this staff 18 percent more productive.

CONCLUSION

Companies that have not extended business intelligence and performance management to their human resources function should consider doing so. The mandate of human resources — recruiting, hiring, training, retaining, and properly assigning employees — is too important to be left to labor-intensive and inconsistent reporting and analysis. Enabling human resources to accomplish its mission with business intelligence and performance management tools enables companies to increase their bottom line by reducing staff, avoiding new hires, and improving productivity. Although it is important to note that AFOSI does not endorse any products, Nucleus found its use of Cognos 8 to better manage human resources and improve productivity is a good example of how human resources departments can benefit from business intelligence.

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