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Dashboards are the visual paradigm for workforce metrics and business intelligence. Deceptively simple and easy to use, they mask a complex technology infrastructure and require extraordinary implementation and change management skills to provide actionable decision support.

Our first foundation article, “New Face of Business Intelligence,” by Wayne Eckerson, Data Warehouse Institute, discusses dashboards and scorecards as a visual display mechanism that merges the functionality of business intelligence technology and performance management. He distinguishes between scorecards and dashboards, discusses their characteristics, and their layers of information – summary, multidimensional, and transactional – that make the dashboard truly useful to business leaders and employees. He also discusses the technical and business architecture. If you read no other articles in this issue, read this one.

In “Human Resources Dashboard: Visualizing Employee Data to Drive Business Strategy,” David Ludlow, SAP, discusses the value of dashboarding and the underlying technology to deliver easy-to-use dashboards. He emphasizes that dashboards do not have a “one-size-fits-all” and realistically points out that to deliver what each and every user needs, customization is required. He concludes his piece with best practice implementation advice.

In “Maximizing Workforce Analytics through Dashboards,” Joanne Bintliff-Ritchie, chief strategist at DoubleStar, puts a dashboard in the context of delivering workforce analytics solutions and further explains the fundamentals. She explains why dashboards are the most important workforce analytics (WFA) tool, shows that they can be used without scorecards and benchmarks, and why Software as a Service (SaaS) can be best for some organizations while in-house solutions make sense for others.

She reminds us too that these are implemented by organizations that utilize a business performance management (BPM) framework to manage strategy and plan execution.

When I think of benchmarks, I think of two organizations: Saratoga and Infohrm (previously CLC Metrics). In a different kind of article, Brian Kelly, Infohrm and Scott Pollak, director, PricewaterhouseCoopers/Saratoga each answer the same questions to help readers distinguish between their two organizations. They discuss the value of benchmarking, whether there should be standardized metrics definitions, the role benchmarks should play on dashboards, how to choose relevant metrics to display, and more.

I went to a man with years of experience, Rob Eidson, an early adopter of analytics, first with Hewlett-Packard and now with Deloitte & Touche, to provide an article on “Meaningful Dashboards for HR.” The purpose of his article is to place value on the day-to-day operational metrics of HR and improve the operational capability of HR. He describes what HR’s dashboards should and should not look like and how to make any dashboard meaningful, relevant and useful.

Dr. John W. Boudreau, University of Southern California and Peter Ramstad, The Toro Company remind us in “The Trick to HR Measurement” is that “its not just the numbers or the interface,” as they can result in information overload. They discuss that lessons from Marketing and Finance suggest the need for a talent decision science – “talentship.” For them, a logical framework that articulates the key connections between talent decisions and organizational strategic success is needed. They provide five pieces of advice to achieve success.

And since this issue is about visual paradigms, we cannot ignore other valuable visualization approaches. What bet-

ter than the organization chart as a way to display key metrics? Jim Candler, Human Concepts, shows the value of centralized, Web-based organization charts that can deliver value far exceeding expectations and shows how they can provide an early warning system.

Our department editor, Steve Secora, has compiled a stellar group of articles that further provide insights. In Talking With, Babak Varjavandi, Nakisa, continues to discuss dashboarding data visualization to get a view into the enterprise and employee/talent data. In Solutions Under 10K, Jeremy Shapiro, Hodes iQ Talent Management System, discusses “dashboards on a dime” using Excel skills, a decent development methodology, and your ability to extract data from a few systems. Back to the technology underpinning, Mary Ann Downey, in Tech Notes, describes OLAP and how it helps enable dashboarding. In Function Focus, Anne Nimke, Pinstripe and Rosette Cataldo, Knowledge Management Systems discuss why employee engagement metrics and onboarding technology are critical to success. In Service Delivery Alignment, Amanda Trobley, Beeline Surveys, provides insights on the advantages of outsourcing an HR dashboard over building it in house. And last, but by no means least, Steve Carlson, TriNet, in Inner Circle, answers the question whether “the dog eats its own food” showing how its own executive staff uses its business intelligence dashboards.

As with any elegant technology, the infrastructure required for effective and actionable dashboards is complex and consists of multiple components, but implementing them to address strategic needs and paying attention to change management will smooth your way. Make no mistake of this, whether considering a build your own or buy strategy. Hopefully this issue, with articles on technology and best practice advice, will help.