MEASURED AND TREASURED:

MASSACHUSETTS PUTS HR ANALYTICS TO WORK FOR ITS PEOPLE

"The investment in HR Analytics isn't only an investment in technology, but equally an investment in the capability of the HR team by allowing them to be more strategic by problem-solving with facts rather than anecdotes while influencing decisions with their respective business partners."

- Ron Arigo, Chief Human Resources Officer, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Everyone wants to be acknowledged as an individual, with most people cringing at being treated "like a number." But sometimes numbers can help deliver more personalized services. That's the case in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which is using a wealth of HR data to inform workforce-related decision making. Better insights are helping leaders attract, develop and retain talent while supporting higher employee productivity and satisfaction. Ultimately, state workers are empowered to deliver better and more enduring outcomes to the people they serve.

As the state's largest employer, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is facing many of the same challenges as other states: Aging workforce. Constrained budgets. And ever-present demand to deliver more services and better outcomes. Those are challenges that Jeff McCue of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) knows well. As Commissioner of DTA, he's always searching for ways to deliver better services to citizens.

With headcount capped at current levels, Commissioner McCue saw a significant challenge with absenteeism and wanted to understand how to help employees better handle high volumes of inquiries and applications while protecting work/life balance. Historically, connecting the dots to tackle that challenge would be long and involved—and might produce questionable findings.

But because of the Commonwealth's commitment to HR analytics, accessing and transforming data into insights is easier than ever. These capabilities make it possible for leaders in DTA and other state agencies to explore new, innovative solutions to address their workforce challenges.

PUTTING DATA TO WORK: DESIGNING FOR SUCCESS

To support 43,000 employees, the Commonwealth relies on an HR service delivery model that combines centralized, transactional functions delivered via an Employee Service Center and higher-touch services delivered through 77 agencies, organized by eight Secretariats. *(See figure 1)* While each Secretariat and his or her agencies have unique needs, they all share common HR challenges around talent recruitment, development and retention, as well as overall productivity and effectiveness.

figure 1.

8 SECRETARIATS

43,000 STATE WORKERS

77 AGENCIES

ALL SUPPORTED BY THE HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION

With those challenges in mind, the Massachusetts Human Resources Division set out to find innovative ways to drive efficiencies in transactional services while repositioning HR as a high-value talent and decision support function for all state agencies. The solution: a world-class HR Analytics program built using service design principles that put people at the center of every decision.

To understand user needs from multiple perspectives, the HR Division took a top-down, bottom-up approach, with Accenture conducting interviews and workshops with 50 HR and business leaders. Those findings helped identify and prioritize 49 high-impact business use cases – that is, ways to use the data to address business challenges. Among the questions asked: Are certain demographic groups turning over at higher rates than others? Can I do smarter workforce planning by better understanding patterns of attrition and new entrants? And, can I understand how the use of overtime compares across agencies, locations and job types? This informed the creation of standard reports and on demand analytics to answer a range of critical HR and business questions across five HR domains (workforce profile, absenteeism, recruitment, retention and compensation).

To power insights, Massachusetts invested in Oracle as its HR Analytics platform. Reinforcing the "people first" approach, the team designed, built and tested the solution in collaboration with 30 business and data champions from across the Commonwealth. The team released the analytics iteratively, allowing time for additional feedback and refinements while also nurturing user buy-in. In time, the analytics capabilities have been released to nearly 200 senior executives, managers and report producers.

At the same time, Massachusetts has affirmed analytics as part of its culture by establishing a dedicated HR Analytics team. This central HR Analytics team collaborates with Secretariat partners to drive business value from the Commonwealth's analytics investment. The team – still under development – aspires to continually enhance the solution, provide operational support to customers, drive user adoption and training, and integrate HR analytics into business and organizational processes.

'WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS TREASURED'

That brings the story back to Commissioner McCue. At DTA, he leads a team of 1,600+ people dedicated to helping low-income individuals and families meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. Every day, DTA serves an average of 2,800+ walk-in visitors and handles more than 14,500 calls to the assistance line. On a monthly basis, the agency receives an average of 21,000 SNAP applications, 3300 TAFDC applications and nearly 2,400 EAEDC applications.

When employees miss work, it has a big impact on service delivery. Partnering with the state's HR Analytics unit, McCue and DTA's Director of Performance Management asked a key question—What are the patterns of absenteeism that reduce time worked?—and established their hypothesis: There are patterns of absence that are diminishing productivity. Then they dug into HR data on anticipated and unanticipated absences—exploring type of absence, seasonality, times of month, days of week, types of caseworkers and different area offices. The resulting insights are empowering DTA to improve workforce planning and work allocation—including casework management based on absenteeism patterns.

For example, a better understanding of projected absenteeism during the holiday season revealed a major risk:

Without advance planning for a heavy vacation season, DTA staff would fall behind in processing

7,000 cases.

That finding prompted DTA to engage other staff to fill the gap in processing responsibilities.
Thanks to those changes, DTA successfully processed an additional

11,500 cases

—maintaining progress in critical Federal timeliness performance measures while giving the agency a jump start heading into the New Year.

In using the HR Analytics capabilities, McCue and his DTA team have adopted a simple yet powerful philosophy: "what gets measured gets treasured." It's a statement that speaks to the power of analytics. It also underscores the commitment of the Commonwealth to its greatest "treasures": its dedicated workers and the citizens they serve.

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