



People count: Building workforce analytics capability at Tanfeeth

For **Giovanni Everduin**, head of HR at **Tanfeeth**, analytics is a journey. He believes the starting point is understanding and accepting a simple principle: If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it. So how is he applying that philosophy to HR?

Tanfeeth is a fast-growing, Dubai-based start-up company of more than 2,000 people. In just under three years we've built a business that provides services predominantly to Emirates NBD – our parent company and our largest customer – at previously unmatched levels of quality and efficiency.

So, how have we been able to increase productivity and reduce costs? By innovating and challenging the old ways of working, guided by rich, powerful data. Our CEO, Suhail Bin Tarraf, encapsulates this approach and our ethos in a single phrase: "Tanfeeth is a scientific, data-driven organisation."

I'm a person, not a number

So how can this principle be applied to HR? Isn't it impossible to apply a 'data-driven' approach without reducing each employee to just a number in a system? Not at all.

Without workforce analytics, HR can report only on the headline statistics – for example, attrition could be reported as "14% this month" and this might at face value be acceptable.

However, to better understand the nature of attrition at Tanfeeth, we segment our employees into groups who have similar attributes. At the click of a button, using our analytics tools, we can view hundreds of attrition rates for various groups of employees, which means we can identify spikes and trends among important populations, like our UAE nationals in junior grades.

Because our attrition rate is broken down into segments, we can find the pockets and attributes of high attrition that are hidden within a headline statistic. Armed with this information we can design an effective strategy and measure its impact.

We also correlate attrition against a variety of employee demographics and key rewards and engagement metrics. Through this we have been able to understand the drivers behind attrition in the Tanfeeth context, which allowed us to build a model that can predict attrition.

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predict what will happen next and better serve the needs of both our employees and our business.

A single source of truth

There's an old and true saying about analytics: "Rubbish in, rubbish out." If the data isn't right, the analysis will also be faulty. So knowing this, we started our workforce analytics journey by taking a closer look at our HR data. A common mistake I see is that people want to dive into the fancy analytics tools and dashboard, without doing the less glamorous work

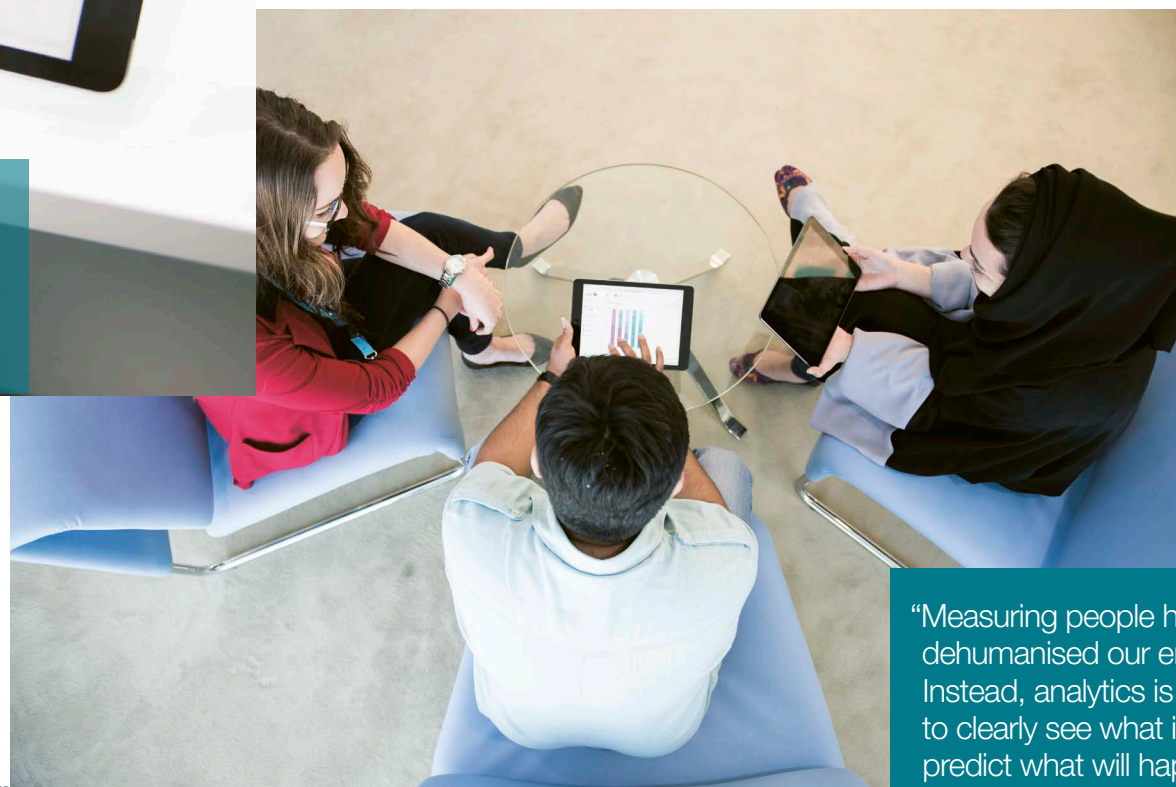
It's hard to say what might drive data errors in other businesses but we found many of the ones we identified were due to silos in our data structure. Updates made in one part of our system often didn't flow across into other relevant databases and core elements of HR data were stored in multiple different systems. On top of this we found serious issues in both the validity and completeness of our data. All of this made it virtually impossible for us to get a holistic view of HR data, and prevented any real data analysis efforts.

How did we overcome this challenge? 'Data warehousing' was an expensive option that we rejected. Instead, we have used cloud-based technology to validate, clean and consolidate our employee information into a single master database. In doing so, we've significantly improved the accuracy of our information without incurring large costs. We call this master base "our single source of HR truth" and it's the backbone of our HR analytics capability.

Analyse this

An accurate database is the foundation for workforce analytics. The key to unlocking the benefits of this database is the tools you use to analyse it. We know many organisations have teams of analysts who crunch numbers and produce Excel-based reports. Others rely on the analysis packages supplied by their ERP provider. We identified problems with both approaches.

A process that relies on analysts and uses spreadsheets is slow and can be inaccurate; humans are error-prone and salary costs can quickly add up. On the other hand, 'off-the-shelf' packages from ERP providers are often built by 'technologists' who don't fully understand HR professionals' needs.



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of cleaning the data. In my experience this has proven to be a big reason why analytics implementations fail and I would urge every HR professional working on analytics to first spend time getting their data in order.

Like many other organisations, our HR data sits in an ERP (enterprise resource planning) system. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean it is accessible or easy to interpret. Conflicts are common in databases and, depending on when and how you input information, you might find errors creeping in.

We invested considerable effort and worked with experts to triangulate and sense-check our data. This enabled us to identify weaknesses in the processes we use to enter and maintain data in our system.

We are taking a different approach – Tanfeeth is pioneering a new analytical software called Qlearsite, built for analysing and displaying HR information. It allows us to access and examine all our employee data in real-time using a platform custom-built for that purpose.

We participated in the development of this software and contributed to the design process. It's now being used by HR teams in other leading global companies but we are proud to have been the first business in the Middle East to implement such an advanced workforce analytics solution. The possibilities and benefits of having access to HR analytics are substantial. The direct benefits are obvious – better workforce insights that



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Looking to the future

Analytics is the start of a journey for Tanfeeth’s HR team. We now have the insights to make more strategic decisions about our employees, their benefits and their performance; but we won’t stop there.

We will soon be applying techniques that allow us to identify and monitor critical skills groups within our business. Soon Tanfeeth will be able to see the informal networks that exist in our business, predict attrition and identify future leaders based on a scientific view of their leadership attributes.

We will also pioneer techniques that are completely new to HR in this region; I strongly believe that engagement and performance management are long overdue for change and we are exploring tools that could transform the way we interact with employees. Why measure engagement only once a year using a survey when there are new technologies that will allow us to constantly monitor staff commitment and feelings towards their work? Why use an annual performance management review process when, through ‘gamification’ and social media, people have grown accustomed to peer-driven, continuous, and immediate feedback and recognition? The time is right for HR to evolve, to match the disruptive pace at which technology is transforming how people interact.

HR is a relatively new concept, the term itself emerged only in the 1950s. These days, more and more businesses recognise that employees are their most important assets and improved HR practices are essential to business performance. As a result of this focus, HR practices are changing rapidly all over the world.

Workforce analytics and technology are at the forefront of that change. Tanfeeth is enjoying the benefits of being an innovator and we believe that change is inevitable for all businesses. It’s just a question of who moves first and who gets left behind. ●

enable better business decisions. What is also becoming clear is that there are many unexpected ancillary benefits.

For example, fast real-time data on headcount, competencies and directly associated costs makes workforce planning relatively simple and significantly more accurate. Most HR professionals will know the difficulty and frustration of managing various versions of an ‘org chart’ in PowerPoint.

Our system addresses this through a simulation capability that allows for a simple push of a button to view and print both current and to-be organisational structures.

Upgrading our analytics capabilities means assessment data can be analysed quickly and accurately, together with other key data such as performance scores and engagement. Internal and external (e.g. regulatory) reports are easy to produce and our submissions are more complete and accurate.



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