

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF
THE CURRENT AND PREDICTED
CHANGES CAUSED BY
CORONAVIRUS ON NHS ENGLAND
PEOPLE PLAN, AND HOW THEY
RESPONDED TO THE CHANGES.**



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Introduction

Human resource management can be defined as an organizational function which is responsible for managing, attracting and retaining people who make up the company (Bogardus, 2004). Armstrong (2008) states that people are the best resources a firm can have. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) further explain people resourcing as employment activities that guarantee an organization has the human capital needed, as well as being able to deal with other related matters. These include: recruitment and selection, talent management, workforce planning, attraction and retention amongst other activities. According to Bloom et al, (2012), every organization understands that people management is fundamental to its success. Pilbream and Corbridge (2010) also clarify that people resourcing is peculiar to the organizational context and circumstances.

Grant (1991) states that *'the firm's most important resources and capabilities are those which are durable, difficult to identify and understand, imperfectly transferrable, not easily replicated, and in which the firm possesses clear ownership and control. These are the firm's 'crown jewels' and need to be protected; and they play a pivotal role in the competitive strategy which the firm pursues. The essence of strategy formulation, then, is to design a strategy that makes the most effective use of these core resources and capabilities'* (cited in Armstrong, 2010:187).

The essence of people resourcing policies is to outline the long-term HR plans of an organization with a focus on making sure the organization retains its competitive advantage by attracting and retaining the right set of people (Armstrong, 2010). Friedman (2013) opines that there are four major external factors that affect human resource management, and these are: government regulations, economic conditions, technological advancements, workforce demographics. This essay will focus on NHS England people plan, examine the current changes that have been adapted as a result of the influence from the external environment, and the future plans they look forward to adopting. It can be said that NHS England were quite flexible with their people plan during the outbreak of coronavirus and new structures like the life assurance scheme was put in place as a compensation to the frontline workers who lost their lives to the pandemic.

Company background

The National Health Service (NHS) came into existence on the 5th of July 1948 and was created by the then Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan. The reason behind its creation was to ensure that healthcare was made available to everyone, irrespective of social standing (Brain, 2018). The NHS

has defined the UK identity as well as shaped the health, life, sickness, birth and death of the UK publics (NHS70). It has also been described as being more than an organization as it has set a precedent on how the UK values health individually and societally (Appleby and Abbasi, 2018). This establishment called the NHS has united doctors, nurses, hospitals, and other medical professionals under one service and this is increased the number of people working for the establishment. In 2018, there were an estimated 1.2m people working for the organization (Triggle, 2018).

NHS People Plan

The NHS believes that people who are dedicated, committed and work for them help ensure a positive range of healthcare services for everyone; and this further relates to the fact that the more the people are engaged, the better productive and effective they will be, and the quality of care received by the patients will be top-notch (NHS Longer term plan, 2019). This can be further linked to the resource-based theory in human resource management. This states that resources that are valuable, difficult to imitate and rare position the company for long-term success, and as such, these organizations need to look within to locate their sources of competitive advantage through the utilization of their resources (Edwards, 2014). Gratton et al (1999) further cites Barney (1991), Lundy (1994) saying that the competitive advantages of organizations are not limited to their financial standing or capital, it goes further into the organization and focuses on the people and processes that can encourage customer satisfaction; this achievement puts them ahead of their competitors.



Fig. 1 *NHS People Promise (NHS, 2020)*

The NHS publicised its 10-year plan in 2019 which they described as a service model. Some of the changes they looked forward to implementing was an integration of technology into their services as well as focusing more on their people so that they are rightly engaged at work and deliver excellent results. Later in the year, they produced another interim report which was targeted at improving working conditions of their human capital and transforming the way they work together (NHS, Interim People Plan, 2019). This further alludes to the fact that people are valuable resources and without them, an organization cannot exist (Armstrong, 2014).

The 2019 NHS long term plan states different approaches they have recruit more people to join the workforce. However, they also understand that the current workforce is working under pressure due to the high staff turnover. This has been as a result of members of staff moving between different employers, some of the advancing in their careers as well as others retiring from service. The interim people plan (2019) further itemizes the changes the NHS hope to achieve in order to improve their overall services: they are:

- Ensuring the NHS is the best place to work
- Prioritizing recruitment of nurses
- Creating a new operational workforce model

NHS England current international recruitment strategy

Dowling et al (2017) state that IHRM is an interplay of three dimensions of human resource activities, types of employees and countries of operation. The main distinguishing factor is that IHRM focuses on employees located in different geographical locations from their current nationalities. There are several reasons why people find themselves working in foreign countries as expatriates. Schuler et al (2010) further buttresses this point saying that because of the uncertainties and high competition within the global environment, organizations have begun to experience talent challenges, which are as a result of globalization, competition, customer markets amongst other issues.

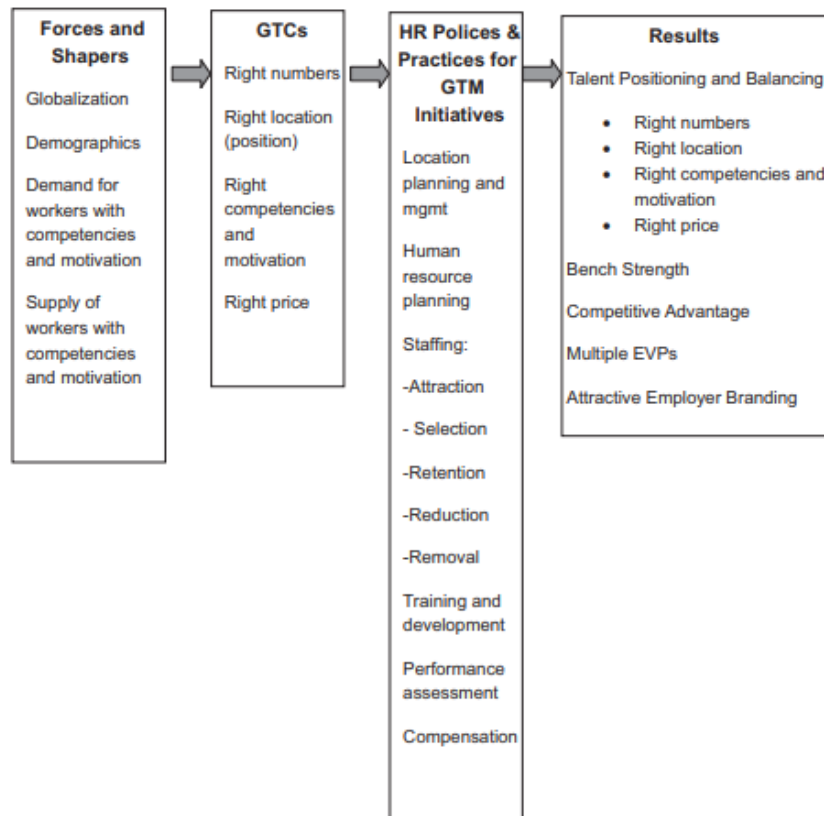


Fig 2. Framework for Global Talent Challenges and Global Talent Management Initiatives. (Schuler et al, 2010)

NHS England has a general international recruitment team that focuses on the employment of expatriates. They believe that recruiting expatriates is an important aspect of their workforce strategy (NHS Employers, 2019).

In 2019, the NHS began a campaign to recruit 2000 family doctors internationally by 2020. The plan was to these expatriates to work alongside other general practitioners (GP) trained in England to help them discover a variety of health services. This approach can be further linked to the academic lexicon called international human resource management (IHRM). Therefore, it can be argued that the NHS were forced to implement an international recruitment campaign due to their shortage in the right talent to meet their demands. Based on the above, the NHS international recruitment plan focused on the following to attract the right human capital. The below strategies are some of the different resourcing strategies employed by the international recruitment team in employing professionals.

Family relocation benefit

NHS England understands that migrating into a new country comes with its challenges. Their plan offers expatriates help with arranging transportation, locating suitable accommodation, schools and other essential facilities to ensure the family is comfortable. They also offer to pay for relocation costs for personal belongings as well as pets. They have plans in place for family members to improve their English language which in turn increases their chances of being gainfully engaged in England (NHS England, 2019).

Training scheme

CIPD (2020) defines training as a tutor-led intervention created to encourage behaviour change or acquisition of new skills. Once the expatriate has arrived in England, they get the opportunity to be enrolled onto the international GP training scheme. Here, the individual is given a GP trainer who helps them conceptualise a bespoke training package. The individual will also receive monthly income during the different levels of trainings as well as get registered on the National Medical Performers list. This means they are 'suitably qualified, have up to date training, have appropriate English language skills and have passed other relevant checks' (NHS England, 2019:4).

Rewards and benefits

Armstrong (2010) states that rewards management focuses on policies put in place to make sure that the input of the people to achieve the organizational aims and objectives are adequately compensated. Upon the successful completion of the training and induction programme, the expatriate can look forward to receiving a starting salary of £68,000. Besides this, other perks include: paid maternity and paternity leave as well as parental and carers leave (NHS England, 2019).

The external environment

The environment within human resource management context according to Chand (2017) is a collection of forces that affect the operation of different human resource activities. HRM exists in two types of environment internal and external. The internal environment comprises of different elements in a firm that affect the HR functions, while the external environment consists of external factors that that can impact the organizations functionality. Here, the organization does

not have control over the external environment. Examples of external forces are political influences, economic instabilities, technological advancements, amongst others.



Fig. 3 The macro environment.

Oxford college of marketing (2014)

Coronavirus

December 2019 saw the outbreak of a severe acute respiratory syndrome infection in Hubei Province, China. This infection began to spread rapidly, and in February 2020, the World Health Organization named the disease coronavirus (Zu et al, 2020). The widespread outbreak of the virus created a global pandemic and this led nations to find ways to intervene so as to reduce its spread. One of the mitigation techniques was to lockdown cities and in some places the whole nation as it helped to slowdown the infection rate of the virus; this in turn reduced the high demand for healthcare (Yang et al, 2020). It can therefore be argued that coronavirus is an aspect of the external environment that cut across almost all global sectors and had a great impact on the health sector in the United Kingdom.

Addressing the changes caused by coronavirus within the NHS

In the UK, the impact of coronavirus had a far-reaching effect on the NHS. Various measures were put in place to combat the disease as well as ensure proper healthcare was administered to those who were urgently in need. This meant redeployment of current members of staff, as well as a recruitment drive to re-engage retired workers and usher in newly qualified professional to help fight the pandemic (Propper et al, 2020).

Retirees re-joining the workforce

In March 2020, the UK parliament approved the Coronavirus Act 2020 which created provisions called emergency powers to guide public organizations on various ways to respond to the virus. The act focused on three main branches: reducing the resourcing and administrative burden on public firms, reducing the impact of staffing shortages on public service delivery and delegation of extra powers to the government on mitigating the spread of the disease (Marshall et al, 2020). The above led the NHS to rehire professionals who had retired to join the workforce and help defeat the virus, whilst providing optimum care to other non-covid patients (NHS Employers, 2020).

Additional workforce supply

COVID-19 led to a shortfall in workforce supply across the health sector in the UK, and this led to temporal measures being created to address the situation. One of which is the fast-tracking of medical students in their final year to join the workforce so as to help combat the outbreak. This meant that the medical students who had not written their final examinations had to forfeit them as alternate assessment methods were employed (Lacobucci, 2020). This can further be related to the resource-based theory of human resource management which emphasizes the importance of people as well as the competitive advantage they bring to the work environment (Armstrong, 2014).

Introduction of the life assurance scheme

As a result of the multiple risks members of staff faced during the dispensation of their duties, a new structure was created in favour of NHS workers. In April 2020, a life assurance scheme came into being, further protecting frontline NHS members of staff. This further meant that in the unfortunate event an eligible member of staff passed on whilst working, there would be a onetime payment of £60,000 to those they left behind. The other benefit of this scheme is that its fully taken care of by the NHS as members of staff need not contribute to it (NHS Employers, 2020). It can therefore be argued that this scheme is a form of reward segmentation, due to the fact that only people who lost their lives in active service are eligible for this fund. This further corroborates Armstrong (2014) as he opines that segmentation of rewards refers to benefits that are given to specific sets of people within an organization.

The future of NHS people strategy

With the unprecedented global impact of the coronavirus on all sectors of the economy, changes are being made in resourcing strategies of organizations as businesses are looking forward to new ways of working. The NHS has outlined some of the new changes that will occur within their recruitment and retention strategy for 2021.

Increasing local recruitment

- NHS England are deciding to look inwards and increase employment of local people to fill certain roles (NHS England, 2020).
- There will also be more apprenticeship roles available across all levels. This they believe will afford prospective employees the opportunity to learn, alongside gaining appropriate experience, whilst achieving their academic credentials (NHS England, 2020).
- Plans are in place to increase primary care network as an additional roles' reimbursement scheme has been introduced. This plans to fund over 25,000 prospective employees and this is in place till 2024 (NHS England, 2020).

International recruitment

- NHS England will begin to engage more local hubs across the world. These hubs will further create top notch models for international recruitment. This the NHS believes will empower start-up hubs as well as giving better value for money and supporting local businesses ((NHS People Plan, 2020).
- NHS England is also collaborating with the government of the United Kingdom in establishing more business relationships in new countries. this will lead to the countries supplying the NHS with the appropriate human talent needed. Plans are also in place to eradicating recruitment barriers within countries ((NHS People Plan, 2020).
- English language training programmes will now be available for international recruits. This will be offered to mostly nurses in order to boost their confidence and enable them communicate effectively ((NHS People Plan, 2020). This can be further linked to the human capital theory which opines that training and development of the human capital

are returnable investments which should be included within the investment capital of a firm (Itika, 2011).

- A new visa called the health and care visa was introduced in August, 2020. This will enable eligible health professionals based in other countries to be able to migrate to the UK as expatriates and fill up eligible positions. This visa does not include the immigration health surcharge that other work visas have, and applicants get decisions on their applications faster than other types of visa (NHS People Plan, 2020).

Coming back to work with the NHS

As a result of some previous members of the NHS workforce being asked to return and help, a number of them expressed the desire to continue working. Therefore, NHS England are working on plans to enable those who joined temporarily to work get a permanent contract, as well as appropriate trainings to ensure they are reintegrated back into the system successfully (NHS People Plan, 2020).

Conclusion

This essay set out to identify the current and future impacts of the external environment on the resourcing strategies of NHS England. It can be said that coronavirus really affected the resourcing strategies of the organization; however, they were able to adapt immediately to changing environment by being flexible with their working document, as well as being open to the dynamism and accepting to implement new approaches that made working an enjoyable process. This further corroborates Armstrong (2014) statement on work design which states that for organizations to be effective and productive, there needs to be certain systems in place, as well as a conducive environment; one of which is the move from orthodox styles of working, to more conventional approaches. This can also be related to the Warwick model of human resource management which, unlike other models, considers the external environment also has an influence on resourcing strategies of organizations (Thierry, 2018).

It is recommended that uncertain nature of the external environment is something every organization should have a plan for, so they do not get caught up last minute when the inevitable happens.

Whilst the life assurance scheme is a laudable initiative; it is often said that money does not solve all issues. Therefore, it is also advisable that NHS England includes other non-financial benefits like permanent residency to expatriate families who lost their loved ones to the pandemic. This creates an atmosphere of a caring environment that is truly concerned about those left behind and their future welfare and survival. As it stands, some of them may be forced to return back to their homes and this may be emotionally difficult to restart life after losing their relative in another country.

Due to the rapid advancement of technology in the global workspace, NHS England can consider automating some of their international recruitment strategies, possibly with the inclusion of artificial intelligence technology that can improve some internal processes which are being done manually. The millennial workforce is also another factor to be considered. Young people look forward to working collaboratively and flexibly, and research has shown that there are technologies that can make this happen. Morgan (2014) states that a high percentage of employees are of the opinion that companies that offer flexible work environments are more attractive to prospective human capital. This will attract the right human resources and further help achieve their organizational goals.

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