

Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human Resources

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Resource and Talent Planning - On the Job Submissions

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Signed: 

Date: 29th August 2020

On the job submissions – Resource and Talent Planning

How Pembrokeshire County Council's approach to succession planning has changed

As the council encompasses many different service areas and professions, a singular, council-wide approach to talent planning has always been difficult to pin down. In 2019 a plan was drafted to focus on workforce planning in general over the next few years and to share best practices from areas who tackle succession planning with a degree of success with areas who could improve.

An example of an area that does this well is within social care. Because it is a requirement that managers within social care are not only qualified as social workers but also experienced, there are opportunities for staff to work towards leadership positions while building their skills as social workers. There is also a strong culture of movement within the social care team. Although the general qualifications are the same for social workers in different fields, staff moving to adult services after dealing with children is still a fantastic opportunity for growth. The majority of managers within this department have been developed from within the social worker team ensuring that the organisation's culture continues to be fostered (Hirsch, 2000, p. 7) and opportunities for growth and development are recognised by the wider team.

In contrast, the council's corporate environment is widely known to be very static with very little room for growth. There are some exceptions but in many cases, management and senior positions are outside hires. I myself in a Senior HR Assistant role was hired externally while there hasn't ever been a promotion of an HR Assistant into a Senior.

The way the HR department are planning to tackle this is through the variety of initiatives introduced in this 2019 plan. The first is to begin introducing more easy access, short term redeployments for staff to experience a role before they decide to pursue it. Thereby empowering them to have a hand in their own development (Weeks, 2020). By opening up these opportunities, it allows staff to experience the different aspects of these roles and in turn for service managers to see these individuals in these roles. The hope is that this leads to natural movement taking place. There is also a focus on encouraging promotion by reducing external hiring and therefore influencing managers to actively develop their staff to ensure they stay at the council and progress (Green, 2019). This is complimented by initiatives that move to make learning and development part of working culture. Managers will be encouraged to plan in time for their staff to not only complete mandatory learning but also work on their own development plans in line with potential career growth.

Although the COVID 19 pandemic has stalled some of this progress. The temporary redeployment used during this crisis, allowing staff to experience and train in different roles and managers to work with people they wouldn't normally has opened their eyes to the possibilities of development and succession planning.

The trends for employee turnover and suggestions of initiatives to improve retention

By reviewing statistics for leavers in Pembrokeshire County Council I found that there were two service areas with comparatively higher employee turnover although its is relatively low in all areas of the council. The highest were within the Leisure sector, which employs many school leavers on part time, hourly paid contracts who are less inclined to stay long term. In many ways, their positioning as an "employer of churn" (Taylor & Woodhams, 2016, p. 61) works well for the leisure

centres as they have access to a large number of flexible staff they can call upon when required. Although mass hiring may be a fairly regular activity, there will always be talent available from the range of schools and colleges in Pembrokeshire with fairly limited options for flexible, part time employment for young people as a loose rural market (Bawden, 2018).

My overall focus for employee turnover in the council is in the Children's services social care sector which has an annual turnover rate of 10.2%. However, when factoring considering social workers transferring into other roles within the council this number jumps to 49%. A common challenge that managers in the children's service area have is, quite soon after hiring, many social workers look to transfer over into adult services. As working with children is considered more mentally draining, retaining young social workers in these posts has proven very difficult. This trend also seems to stem from the culture of movement, which I previously mentioned is encouraged for development despite it being a detriment to retention of staff in this area. In 2019 the council created 5 trainee social worker posts which attracted a lot of attention with over 150 applicants. This was due in part to the access it gave to becoming a fully qualified social worker but also due to the relatively high starting salary. Unfortunately they have already lost 3 of the trainee social workers as they were finding the work too challenging and the high wages weren't enough to compensate. This also highlights another challenge for retaining social workers in Pembrokeshire as neighbouring authority Carmarthen typically offers salaries of around 10% more, meaning that staff who live on the edge of the county are more than happy to commute over and staff have started to leave for this reason.

I think one recommendation I would make would be better screening during the selection stage. As so many children's workers are leaving within the first year to move into adult services it's important to select candidates who are aware of the challenges of the role. The high salary offer is attracting interest but the reality is that this job doesn't suit everyone. I think more selective criteria coupled with realistic expectations set during induction (Green, 2019). would have some impact on this number. That said, I believe the freedom for staff within social services to move around from a development and succession planning perspective isn't a bad thing and therefore I feel we may be able to factor employee movement into our workforce plan. If moving between areas is factored into social workers learning and development plan, we may be able to promote movement the other way from adult into children's services as well. Thereby giving social workers rounded experience in all areas and without the need to backfill (Peters, 2019). In the instance of staff leaving for higher pay, it appears the council cannot compete with neighbouring Carmarthen but in which case I think it would be beneficial to bring more emphasis on the benefits of working as a Social Worker for PCC. Offering more flexibility so the employee feels they have more control over their work-life enabling them to act more independently while also feeling better supported by their manager (Wood, 2018) but also promoting well being with in-house occupational health and counselling services.

Summary of a discussion with my line manager about my skills and areas for improvement in relation to the work above.

Through discussing my solutions to the above activities in line with the CIPD profession map (CIPD, 2020), my manager and I have been able to isolate some key developmental areas for me over the next year. My manager believes that through my previous work experience at an employer of choice I have developed some good instincts for working with people and a good understanding about what makes people want to work in an organisation. We agreed that I have high standards for employee experience that extends to the importance I place on candidates impressions of our organisation and this impact on employer brand (Houghton, 2019). We also discussed my previous experience with

learning and development and the importance I place on providing opportunities for staff to grow within their job. I have therefore found the concept of using development and succession planning as a method to drive employee engagement and, by extension, employee retention (Peters, 2019) much easier to grasp.

The areas we identified as requiring improvement are especially focused on the areas requiring a broader knowledge of an organisation and using analytics to back up my ideals around employee experience. We looked at the “Business Acumen” and “Analytics and Creating Value” sections of the profession map (CIPD, 2020) and we talked about how gaining a broader knowledge of all the workings of the council through working with different HR partners, service areas and through analysing budgetary and people based data (Tucker, 2019, p. 17) will help my understanding of why certain decisions are made; and how I can affect change. As I have joined the authority during a pandemic, working remotely has made this more difficult but my knowledge will grow over time; especially if I have this as a focus. I have already begun to work with recruitment more closely in requisition approval so I believe I will get better instincts to how I can advise heads of service on planning for growth. Over time, while working with recruitment I hope to have a greater understanding of the “systematic” and cost based approaches (Taylor & Woodhams, 2016, p. 58) we can take with developing a workforce plan.

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