

Identifying skills gaps & building resilience

Long term skills planning is crucial in a challenging post-Brexit & Covid world

Hosted by RiaBailes

Speakers

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BPC

Bailes Partners Consulting

Session notes

Ria Bailes introduced the session as the second in a series of webinars between CIH and BPC looking at skills for the sector. The focus was on sector-wide emerging skills, current skills gaps and building resilience within organisations and teams.

BPC work with the housing sector providing tangible solutions to business-critical problems. The CIH and BPC have collaborated to put on this series of webinars aimed at providing relevant insight for leaders. BPC operates across four key areas:

- **Leadership effectiveness** – helping leaders to perform at their best so their teams can excel. Modern leadership is characterised by the ability to foster connection between people and organisations. BPC helps leaders build an environment where their people can thrive.
- **Organisational change** - fast paced change is a characteristic of the modern world. Whether it is technological change, an organisation's response to societal changes or structural change, people are at the centre of every organisation and BPC helps to deliver people-focused change.
- **Business growth** - we recognise leaders' responsibility to identify challenges to forward progress and navigate challenging operating environment. We help leaders devise a coherent approach to growing their business.
- **HR Consultancy** - our range of general HR services complement the rest of our offer.

We covered the importance of identifying skills gaps and building organisational resilience. The discussion was framed around the importance of taking a long-term approach to current and future skills requirements and why this is essential for our organisations.

Particularly in the current environment, it is essential that organisations have a good picture of their existing skills, their emerging skills needs and how this translates to business critical operation. It is well known that there is a skills shortage at present and that organisations are competing to attract and retain talent. Speakers believe that this will become more acute over the next five years with emerging skills increasing in demand.

Speakers and delegates agreed that more debate is needed on skills with a longer term broader view of the skills needed for the housing sector. It was recognised that traditional methods of obtaining skills are not so readily available in a post Brexit and Covid landscape. Given it is unlikely that the Government are going to solve national skills shortages and as skills don't develop overnight, developing skills is a long-term pipeline we need to focus on.

We invited keynote speakers to offer their unique insight as leaders in the field. Below are key areas of discussion.

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Current and emerging skills

- The panel discussed skill gaps such as building safety, biodiversity and data-related roles, highlighting IT was in high demand given the drive to modernise systems, customer experience and access to information.
- Demands on certain roles are brought about by external pressures and short supply of skills which artificially increase wages and can hamper an organisations ability to be agile. This scenario creates a compelling need to future proof talent pipelines and grow talent from within.
- A key problem is the lack of a well-articulated description of the sector as a great place to work. There are a lifetime of careers within housing, it is regularly in the headlines, it is a cornerstone of communities and aligns with key agendas such as social justice and the environment. Yet housing is not a well-known career choice.
- Increased staff turnover rates are now common and employers will need to do more to retain skills. It is therefore important to develop employee learning packages to attract, develop and retain people.
- Current thinking suggests up to 50% of our workforces may be seeking a new job elsewhere. How do we address this challenge? Firstly, we need to join up the long term thinking that the board and executive teams are having around emerging critical roles with the recruitment and skills development strategies being formed within the people/HR teams.
- Development programmes often focus on a small minority of 'future stars' and fail to develop unknown talent. Future stars are also often seen as cast in the mould of current leaders, which limits diversity and potential. Retention and recruitment is a top strategic risk for an organisation. It should be reviewed monthly with executive and at every Board meeting.
- Practical solutions include:
 - Create short, medium and long term skills requirements together to form a coherent plan
 - Review flexible working offer and ensure it is appropriate in a post covid environment.
 - Create succession plans for business-critical roles.
 - Do not focus on replacing like for like – review how roles have and need to evolve to meet future demands.
 - Personal development packages need to go beyond traditional L&D offer so that they develop a robust internal talent pool.
 - Promoting our sector is key so that we are seen as employers of choice. Brand needs to be reviewed and match new expectations of working environment, vision and values

The importance of identifying the right skills required

- It is important to identify the right skills and match those to identified skill shortages within organisations. There was discussion on the perceived skills and skills groups with growing demand by 2025 using data from the 'Future of Jobs' survey by the World Economic Forum in 2022.
- When it comes to employers providing workers with training opportunities for re-skilling and upskilling, in contrast to previous years, employers are expecting to lean more fully on informal as opposed to formal learning. In the Future of Jobs Survey, 94% of business leaders report that they expect employees to pick up new skills on the job, a sharp uptake from 65% in 2018.
- An organisation's learning curricula is expected to blend different approaches, drawing on internal and external expertise, on new education technology tools and using both formal and informal methods of skills acquisition.

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- The top 15 perceived skills that employers will require from their workforce in the future was shared. Often described as 'soft skills' there is an increasing acceptance that skills such as emotional intelligence and resilience are as important as critical thinking.
- The challenge for organisations is to change their recruitment practices to focus on the whole person rather than just technical expertise. Once again, we explored the importance of succession planning, talent management and taking a different outlook to like for like replacement.
- Practical solutions included:
 - Focus on depth, agility and flexibility within teams. Build this into performance planning and training.
 - Develop people for agility and resilience.
 - Reframe 'soft skills' as core foundational skills.
 - Teach people how to manage and lead, it is a specific skill not an innate ability
 - Psychological safety requires authenticity. Without this in place you may develop 'ruinous empathy'.
 - Radical Candour suggested as further reading

Long term solutions - what the future will require

- We heard from the panelists on their views of current skills gaps and emerging needs across the sector taking a longer 5-10 year view. Reinforcing earlier comments of both speakers and delegates, the importance of understanding the business-critical roles of the organisation and sector was discussed and overlaying these against internal development programmes.
- Technology that enables improved employee and customer experience is essential. It is important that technology supports customer service behaviours.
- The discussion focused in on two key components sought from prospective new starters within recruitment cycles; attitude and technical tasks. These can often be in tension with the technical ability scoring higher and holding more weight which is a risk. There was overwhelming agreement that recruiting for attitude should be the most important however the need to fulfill a technical task overrides due to the short-term win. It was argued that this is short sighted. Recruitment therefore needs to be aligned to learning and development capability so that those with high people skills are able to strengthen technical ability. By focusing on the people skill-set first, organisations can ensure they are strong in both areas.
- It is important to safeguard culture when new skills are being brought into the organisation. The skills new employees bring also contribute to the culture of the organisation and this can be both positive and negative so there is a need to think carefully.

"It's all about culture."

Practical solutions included:

- Risk is rising and turnover showing how mobile people are now. It is important to have more than one succession plan in place – create options for your organisation, think about skills in a broader sense and invest in developing them for your organisation.
- Culture of organisation is important and needs to be part of a recruitment strategy
- Recruitment strategies need to involve long term thinking
- Organisation must build broad skills and resilience – not concentrate on one 'super person' within a team
- Build opportunities to encourage debate – demonstrate that disagreement does not have to mean conflict. This will generate discussion and new ways of thinking, generating solutions to business problems

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A big thank you to our speakers. We have more sessions coming up - dates are below. If you would like to be involved then please contact Ria Bailes by email ria@bailespartners.co.uk

Dates for your diary

Session #3 - Finding the skills we need	6th October 2022	10-11.15am
Session #4 - Building talent pipelines	3rd November 2022	10-11.15am
Session #5 – Strategic skills planning tools	28th November 2022	10-11.15am

Stay in touch

If you would like to discuss any of the themes explored within this series or would like to be involved in future sessions, then please contact us by email hello@bailespartners.co.uk