

CIH/BPC Session #4

Building Talent Pipelines

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

Hosted by Ria Bailes

Speakers

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BPC

Bailes Partners Consulting

Session notes

Ria Bailes introduced the session which was the fourth in a series of webinars looking at skills for the sector. We covered the importance of taking a long-term approach to skills and why this is essential for our organisations. Aligning long term skills needs and developing talent pipelines builds resilience within our organisations. It also goes some way to mitigate against labour market shocks and provides us with the skills that we will need for the future within an increasingly uncertain operating environment. This is not tomorrow's problem; developing skills is a long-term investment and needs to be tackled now. It is crucial that organisations understand clearly their existing skills and are able to identify what they need for the future - not just over the next year but along the timeframes of their business plans. Dealing with de-carbonisation, broader environmental pressures, advances in technology and improving customer service levels all require strategic skills planning in addition to financing and structural changes.

Having made similar observations across the sector in relation to skills, the CIH and BPC have got together to put on this series of webinars. Bailes Partners Consulting operates across four key themes;

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.

Change transformation - 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.

HRConsultancy - our range of general HR services complement the rest of our offer.

We invited speakers to join in the debate on skills. They presented compelling arguments for organisations to prioritise the importance of talent and skills pipelines. Finding the right skills for organisations should be a leadership concern and in the current climate should feature on risk registers. Given the external pressures in a volatile economic environment and the effects on the labour market of Covid and Brexit, housing has found itself facing multiple difficulties as the war for talent rages on.

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Throughout the session, speakers encouraged greater dialogue around how we can prepare for emerging skill requirements and workforce resilience. They spoke of the importance of organisations having a good picture of their current skills and how this translates to business-critical operations.

It was identified that there is a growing skills shortage and that where previously organisations might purchase skills from the labour market, this model no longer works in today's environment. Increasingly organisations are having to be creative and turn to alternative methods of meeting their skills requirements such as building internal pathways, redefining career routes and seeking to build skills capacity through apprenticeships.

Speakers and delegates agreed that as the Government is unlikely to intervene in solving national skills shortages and recognising that skills and long-term pipeline do not happen by chance, this conversation needs to gain momentum with further discussion and best practice shared.

Attracting talent - developing the pipeline

A popular phrase we see today is the 'great resignation', which highlights movement within the labour market in unprecedented levels and patterns. Looking at this trend through a different lens, we can also appreciate the 'great aspiration' as candidates look to increase and sustain a better quality of life and expect more from the employer. With the volume of roles coming onto the market, candidates have never had a better opportunity to pick and choose what they want in their future careers.

As organisations continue to adapt and develop their agile working strategies post-pandemic, early signs show some organisations seeking a full time return to the office. Recruitment experts believe this is likely to fuel a further wave of resignations. As workers return to the office in various patterns, organisations need to drive a high level of work-life balance to align with employees needs and expectations on performance and collaboration. A recent LinkedIn poll exploring candidate views on seeking new employment opportunities found:

- 43% would be open to a new role that offered better work life balance
- 29% would seek career progression
- 19% would seek a higher salary
- 10% would want a fully remote role

This snapshot highlights the change in employee expectations, where pre-pandemic, salary would usually feature as the top consideration, this is no longer the case. Many candidates are prepared to place working conditions over salary and this presents an opportunity for the housing sector. Whilst the 'war on talent' is not new, recruitment specialists are finding that employers are having to work even harder to communicate a compelling vision and employee value proposition offer to attract (and retain) talent into their organisations.

Housing is purpose driven and has a great story to tell. However, it often downplays the impact it has on society. People are attracted to social purpose and will build a career with organisations who can highlight the difference they make to peoples' lives. The answer is to develop a compelling communication strategy and communicate, communicate, communicate.

With such a demand on talent, organisations need to look at their succession planning. When developing people, it is important that an infrastructure exists to fully support their career transition. Recruiters are finding that new leaders thrive better when accessing a peer network which they can lean on to fill knowledge or experience gaps. Mentors (external to the organisation) are also an increasingly important feature of succession planning.

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Take away points:

- Employees expect more from employers than ever before in terms of work life balance and development opportunities.
- Organisations need to adapt agile working strategies to individual teams, there is not a one size fits all solution.
- Building talent pipelines from junior levels to senior executives is crucial for all organisations.
- A clear narrative showing the strength of social purpose in housing and breadth of career opportunities needs to be developed.

Apprenticeships & learning programmes

The inability to attract, develop and retain talent is a strategic risk. Housing providers cannot always match private sector salaries and so have to find other ways to distinguish themselves in the labour market. There are a number of ways this can be done, including apprenticeships. These can offer the housing sector a way to create talent development pathways within their organisations in order to develop colleagues and bring new talent into areas where skills shortages are identified.

Ways of sustaining talent pipelines was explored, such as working with local colleges which has become more important to forge links with a local workforce. All too often, housing is not spoken about in schools and colleges as a career choice so people often 'fall into housing' rather than seek a career from the outset. To change this narrative, there is the opportunity to work with schools, colleges, universities and training providers, showcasing our social purpose and brand as an employer of choice.

Apprenticeships, traineeships and work placements are an opportunity to develop talent pipelines aligned to current and future skills gaps. Aligning these pathways to an area of the business that has underdeveloped succession planning is a way to mitigate risk and support capacity levels.

It is helpful to look both inward and to the local community to develop a skilled workforce. Partnering internal training with resident employment and training can increase diversity and empathy within the workforce, help solve skills challenges and leading to better customer service.

Take away points:

- Think about developing the pipeline for the future by working with schools, colleges and universities to attract local talent.
- Understand your business training needs and don't stop developing your people and future leaders in difficult financial environments.
- Focus on succession planning, apprenticeships and management development programmes, particularly for hard to fill and business critical areas.
- Consider what can be part of an attraction strategy besides remuneration - be creative with skills development offers.

Aligning talent pipelines with culture & operations

In this part of the webinar we spoke about the importance of needing to retain talent and align skills development to culture. It is important to review the employee value proposition to ensure it remains attractive and maintain flexibility in adapting to different needs. Non-financial incentives such as volunteering can make a significant impact on culture and engagement. In addition to considering retention strategies, when developing skills through talent pipelines the learning at various stages should be linked to business-critical skills such as negotiation, collaboration, and resilience. Understanding where skills gaps are, which are critical to the business and how these can be developed are key starting points.

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As talent pipelines are developed, there are opportunities to ensure diversity is improved in our organisations. Pipelines can offer career progression that could have otherwise been stymied by societal inequity. Developing skills and talent with a specific lens on improving diversity allows us to tailor interventions, especially when we consider working towards more equitable systems.

Following this discussion we acknowledged that we should also be mindful that when it comes to promotion, whilst technical experts may excel in their current role, we should not assume that they have all the skills to succeed in leading others and people management if promoted. Speakers promoted careful consideration of what being a manager means in your organisation and what sort of behaviours and culture your managers are driving.

When new people join the organisation, communication is key. Communicating the organisations vision, values and clearly articulated culture is important, as well as evidencing what the organisation does in order to put words into action. It was acknowledged that words and intent are not enough anymore, people want to see evidence and action in order to trust their employer. We also heard about initiatives such as using discovery insights as the first training for new starters because this explores what motivates an individual and how they best communicate. A simple colour code is used and is kept visible so that people can demonstrate how they best receive information and communicate.

Take away points:

- Remember to review the employee value proposition regularly and adapt it where necessary.
- Provide internal careers fairs so that colleagues can understand the full breadth and spectrum of opportunities.
- Align learning to culture and skills gaps that are critical to your business.
- Make sure communication is effective so people get the most from it and keep going back to core purpose and the social impact housing has.
- Don't assume technical experts will be good managers or leaders. Leadership requires training.

A big thank you to our speakers. Our final session is on 28th November 2022 10-11.15am.

If you would like to be involved then please contact Ria Bailes by email ria@bailespartners.co.uk