



# Recruiting with the future in mind

**A 4G workforce provides challenges in adapting HR professionals' management approach to work – a challenge which most public sector organisations are failing to meet, argues Lesley Shore**

It is an overused phrase: 'Start with the future in mind', but when it comes to planning the workforce needs of the future, it is incredibly pertinent.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recently launched its revised purpose statement aimed at HR professionals with the strapline: 'Principle-led, evidence-based, and outcome-driven'. This has the aim of focusing HR professionals to stand behind this rallying cry and improve on the HR offer for the future.

So, within the world of local government, with ever-reducing resources, a skills shortage in social care and education already impacting on hard-pressed HR leaders, how can they work with their chief executives and political leaders to deliver further transformational change?

What might be more appropriate in this context is to reverse the proposition and start from the outcome statement: what outcome do we need to see for the future?

Efficiencies and productivity are not likely to be driven by reducing staff numbers or cutting services. For many authorities this is now old news and the scope to address this is no longer an option. A key question, however, is how well has the public sector embraced a 'private sector' mentality in looking at innovative ways to resource efficiently in the future?

The outcome would be the same – filling of skills gaps, an engaged and productive workforce who are clear about what they are there to deliver – but achieved along a very different route.

Private sector organisations who have embraced the gig economy adopted the use of alternative working arrangements in truly flexible approaches to work or have looked to move away from traditional career pathways to consider the skills requirement – not the career history – are winning the battle to deliver efficient services in a cost-effective way, where local government has failed to fully embrace this approach.

## How well has the public sector embraced a 'private sector' mentality in looking at innovative ways to resource efficiently in the future?

Is it our concern for the 'principle-led' part of our purpose statement? Are we scared to use people in a way that does not provide them with a nine-to-five job without the support of our raft of policies and procedures to govern their work?

I would ask us to consider the evidence-led part of our mission statement as the HR leader: how can we evidence that the way we are working currently best serves both the individuals in the job and the public they serve?

A 4G workforce provides challenges in adapting our management approach to work – a challenge which most public sector organisations are failing to meet. This may be due to the current demographic balance of the workforce and those who are the decision-makers – dare I say, mostly older – in traditional public sector roles.

Think how we could tap into the approach of

private sector organisations who use students in their university town in term time and in their home town in the holidays – maintaining and developing the skills of the employee, providing an option to reduce student debt and fill gaps, as well as identifying a pipeline for younger entrants to local government.

What stands in our way as HR leaders to being truly radical in addressing some of these issues? Are we worried about sending a signal

innovative ideas into traditional services, to test, adapt and evolve for the future.

When we recruit HR leaders into the local government sector are we still asking for 'local government experience?', but to what end?

Do we want our HR leaders to be exposed to the wide and fast-paced environment of the private sector and trust that they recognise and can use the transferable skills to bring that expertise and experience to the party, while also understanding the complexity and vagaries of life in the public sector?

No organisation is unique, and while they all have their own way of working, look and feel, a seasoned HR professional should be competent and savvy enough to work their way through this, without having to bring local government experience as baggage to the role.

If we need a different type of workforce to deliver efficiency and productivity, working with a transferable skill set in a way that delivers for us and our service users, our challenge as HR leaders is to demonstrate that with supporting evidence and a principled approach, we can create different outcomes for the future. ■

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