



TTT

Temporary Talent Transfer

How do we ensure our employees develop the necessary skills to meet changing public sector requirements.....?

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September 2016

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Introduction and Objectives

Concern about the quality and quantity of current and future public leaders has led to calls for better talent management. A report by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister urged local government to:

- *Recruit from the widest possible pool of talent*
- *Better manage the careers of high fliers*
- *Recruit more graduates*
- *Facilitate more movement of talent staff across the public sector*
- *Participate in joint leadership development with other public sector organisations.*

*Talent Management in the Public Sector,
The Ashridge Journal, Autumn 2008*

The pace of change within the public sector ensures that talent management remains a central issue for organisations. The key challenge centres on ensuring that employees have the right skills to lead the public sector organisation of the future. Where different types of skills are needed the emphasis for organisations is not only to identify these skills but to ensure they are taking active steps to equip their workforce. This will require new and innovative thinking and action (CIPD 2016).

The primary aim of this project is to develop an approach to talent management that will broaden the skills and flexibility of the workforce in response to changing priorities and demands within the public sector to improve services and customer experiences. This report argues that this can be achieved through facilitating an approach to talent management that enables high performing and high potential employees to develop required skills. The aim is to instil an ethos of talent mobility where short term opportunities across different departments, organisations and sectors provide a source of development for talented individuals.

Through our research we became aware of the Interchange Program, co-ordinated by North West Employers, which offers a variety of opportunities for employee development, including secondments across different organisations and sectors. Following discussions with North West Employers it was clear that, whilst many aspects of the program had been successful, the uptake of secondments, particularly with the private sector, had been low. We therefore decided to focus on enabling the provision of short term opportunities for talented individuals to develop the skills required for public service organisations via the secondment aspect of the program, with specific aims to:

1. Consider how any barriers to participation could be overcome and how we could enable individuals and organisations to engage with this aspect of the program
2. Review the term 'secondment' and consider alternatives which may more accurately reflect the intentions behind the program and how it would be facilitated

The 'bigger picture'

- Devolution
- 'Austerity'
- Ageing population and workforce
- New ways of working requiring new skills and flexibility
- Commerciality and competition with the private sector
- Consultancy costs
- Fast pace of change
- Increase in collaboration and integrated working
- Place based thinking
- Need for innovation
- New generation of employees with changing expectations
- High costs of formal development programmes

Background and Context

Why is talent mobility important for the public sector?

- Address skills gaps and recruitment hotspots
- Reduce consultancy costs
- Improve motivation, engagement and retention of talented individuals by investing in their development
- Improve service delivery and customer experience
- Enable effective collaboration
- Future proof the workforce by developing new skills
- Breakdown barriers and silos between organisations and sectors

What other projects will this support?

- NWE Interchange Program
- Wider talent agenda
- GM Academies, leadership, social work, commissioning
- Shared apprenticeship programmes
- Knowledge and Skills Framework for Social Workers
- Workforce and succession planning
- Collaborative and integration projects between organisations and sectors

Scope

The subject of talent management is multi-faceted and can be approached from many different angles, from defining what talent management is, to selecting talented individuals and groups, and developing talent opportunities for specific groups. Providing opportunities that will attract, develop and retain talented employees is a key concern for all organisations, and the challenge for the public sector this is more acute due to the impact of external factors and the availability of resources.

The primary aim of this project is to focus on one area of talent management where it is identified that there is a need for development, and where there is an opportunity to improve the approach taken to meet the aims of talent management strategies in public service organisations.

Therefore, the project centres on enabling the provision of short term opportunities for talented individuals to develop skills required for public service organisations through cross-organisational and cross-sector work. Whilst the mechanism for this exists in the North West Employers Interchange Program, the lack of uptake provides a further area of focus for this project. The identification of talented individuals, although an important factor in the development of a talent management strategy, is out of scope for this particular project.

It is also acknowledged that although this project refers to the Interchange Program facilitated by North West Employers, our recommendations are transferable and could be adopted in any regional area or organisational network and equally across different regions and networks.

Methodology

In order to identify the key trends and issues relating to the subject of talent management within the public sector a literature review was undertaken as a first step. This informed thinking in relation to the scope of the topic, contextual factors impacting public service organisations in relation to the management and development of talent, and pertinent arguments and discourses relating to the subject of talent mobility.

The comparison of current thinking with current practice in relation to talent management helped to identify key characteristics of potential and actual talent strategies. This information was then further developed through interviews with a range of key stakeholders across a number of organisations which included organisational leaders, senior managers, senior HR practitioners, individuals on existing talent management programmes, and representatives from partner organisations. An additional interview was also undertaken with the lead officer for the North West Employers Interchange Program which aims to develop a multi-sector approach to the development of talent. A total sample of 14 interviews were recorded. This was complemented by analysis of current talent management policies, strategies and approaches within a range of public sector organisations.

Interviews were semi-structured and focused on asking open questions in order to gain further insight and different perspectives relating to the issues identified within the literature and through analysis of existing talent strategies. The findings from these discussions provided a rounded view of the challenges and aspirations of those invested in talent within public service organisations and informed the recommendations and conclusions made.

Findings from wider research

“Public sector leaders need to consider how best to attract, develop, motivate and retain talent while exploring ways of collaborating with the private sector.....to jointly develop talent as opposed to competing for the same talent pool” (PwC 2013)



Why is talent management important for the public sector?

Devine and Powell (2008) argue that public sector organisations need to improve how they manage talent in order to ensure that the workforce has the right skills to deliver now and in the future. The writers point to evidence of difficulties in attracting and retaining talent as a key issue for public sector organisations and state that for talent management systems to work they need buy in from those in the organisation. This includes ensuring the purpose of any scheme is understood and clear to all involved.

The Hay Group (2011) support this argument. They undertook a survey of 131 public sector leaders and identified the key challenges faced by public sector organisations in an era of cuts and reductions. Their findings suggest that many public sector organisations have failed to take a long term approach to talent management when making organisational changes. To address this issue, they argue, public sector organisations should start by looking at what the business needs to deliver in the future and use this to determine workforce requirements, taking targeted action to address gaps.

“Despite almost 60 per cent of leaders having reviewed core organisational purpose, the public sector has failed to take long term talent requirements into account in attempts to restructure and remove cost” (Hay Group 2011)

CIPD (2015) additionally argue that whilst many organisations state that talent management is a key priority due to difficulty in retaining staff in certain roles, many organisations fail to effectively do this. The survey reveals that many organisations say they will but in reality there is little evidence of increased activity in this area.

The benefits of talent mobility

There is a clear argument within the research reviewed that investment in effective talent management should be a top priority for public sector organisations. This leads to the question of what effective talent management should look like, and, how organisations will ensure their talent

strategy is linked to the current and future needs of the organisation. The CIPD (2011) suggest that to meet the needs of the future organisation, the public sector should take a wider approach to talent management that moves away from concerns with holding onto talented individuals for the duration of their career and focuses more on retaining knowledge through ongoing collaborative development, and ensuring knowledge gained is embedded throughout the workforce.

“Forward thinking organisations are moving away from talent ownership to a focus on reciprocal and adult talent partnerships” (CIPD 2011)

Case study examples from innovative industries suggest that there are significant benefits to creating opportunities for talented individuals to collaborate with other talented people, and for organisations to tap into networks and activities that offer the ability to support new types of work and develop new ideas, knowledge and skills (CIPD 2011). This is supported by Zenger et al (2016) who argue that effective talent management should have clear links to business needs and outcomes but equally, should pay attention to individual aspirations and passions in order to generate maximum performance and organisational benefit. Where recruitment freezes can limit the exposure of organisations to fresh thinking, supporting individuals to experience new work environments and build new relationships can improve engagement, sustain retention, and generate innovation (Public Policy Forum 2015). The expectations of a multi-generational workforce mean that Generation Y and Z employees will demand this mobility from any organisation who claims to be an employer of choice. Failing to deliver will result in talented employees leaving for progressive employers who meet their aspirations.

The CIPD (2009) additionally identify key characteristics of innovative talent management practices which include partnerships with other organisations to enable talented individuals to collaborate, learn and share ideas, a focus on experiential learning which is on-the-job but that stretches the individual, challenging talented individuals to bring forward ideas to help improve business performance, and, providing individuals with experience in different sectors and industries to widen their thinking.

The benefits of cross-sector experience

Whilst there is recognition that providing talented individuals with experience in different organisations and sectors can contribute towards personal and professional development, particular reference is made within the literature to the potential benefits of experience gained in a private sector context. Robertson and Prydderch (2015) argue that despite negative perceptions of the public sector, the private sector can gain in many ways from the knowledge and skills of public sector employees. Particular reference is given to the management of complexity and change in public sector organisations, the political context, working with limited resources, and experience of industrial and employee relations.

“Public sector workers have the unique opportunity of providing a new perspective for work in the private sector...a public sector background is a major plus and not something to hide” (Robertson and Prydderch 2015)

The challenge for public sector organisations will be to ensure skills are marketed to potential partner organisations from other sectors. However, if this challenge can be met the potential benefits are clear. Needham and Mangan (2014) argue that in order for public service organisations to thrive going forward they will need to be innovative, agile and connected. Commercial skills are highlighted as essential for the future of public services demonstrating the value of experience gained in private sector contexts. Additionally, it is argued that cross-sector experience can broaden employees' views and enhance their ability to address complex issues and relationships. In addition to developing transferable skills, employees gain contextual

knowledge, enabling them to serve as bridge builders for projects and partnerships in other sectors and areas of work (Public Policy Forum 2015).

The role of HR

Whilst the case for talent mobility as a response to ensuring public service organisations develop skills for the future is clear within recent literature, how this will happen will require further exploration. Wellins et al (2009) argue that an opportunity arises for HR to play a leading role in developing talent strategies that meet future need and using HR expertise to add real value. This includes partnering with key organisational stakeholders to ensure talent management is aligned to business needs and that skills developed are the right ones. HR can ensure success by promoting clarity of vision and expectations, integrating talent processes into existing organisational systems, and implementing outcome measures that demonstrate the organisational impact of talent programmes (Wellins et al 2009).

“Talent Management professionals need to move from a seat at the table to setting the table” (Wellins et al 2009)

Findings from interviews

Interviews were undertaken with a variety of organisational stakeholders to explore different perspectives in relation to the subject of talent mobility. A number of common themes developed which can be categorised into two groups. Whilst the majority of respondents demonstrated enthusiasm towards the idea of talent mobility in the public sector as an approach to talent management, there were a number of key challenges identified that suggest a cultural barrier preventing the uptake of talent mobility programmes.

Benefits identified

- Respondents reported that a talent scheme that would provide a pool of talented individuals would represent better use of resources reducing reliance on agencies to fill areas of skill gaps and expensive consultants for one off pieces of work.
- Transfers to other organisations would help individuals to develop a broader understanding of public services and public service reform as well as the devolution agenda.
- Talent mobility would enable organisations to bring in ideas from other organisations and find better ways of doing things.
- Exposure to different environments was equally believed to be a positive way of providing new ideas for ways of doing things and was regarded as an exciting opportunity for innovation
- Increased talent mobility would help to accelerate integration and benefit wider GM (or other regional networks) due to the fact that the future will mean more shared working.
- That flexibility in public sector organisations is a vital requirement for the future and workforce flexibility can contribute to this.
- Opportunities for reciprocal learning between public and private sector organisations would support the need for skills such as commercial and business acumen, digital skills and commissioning skills in the public sector.

- That we need to 'go big' by forging new relationships with private sector organisations which goes beyond just partner agencies in order to provide opportunities to generate real benefits for public services.
- The expectation of younger people mean they are less willing to remain with one organisation for the duration of their career and want new and varied types of development which could be met by providing opportunities in other organisations.



Barriers and challenges

- There is a potential service delivery risk if contingency planning is not addressed. 'How will I backfill?' was one of the frequent concerns raised by managers and service leads. Operational issues centred on letting talented individuals leave the organisation including the fear of losing high performing employees or employees being poached by other organisations; and, concern for the morale of the team left behind.
- 'Will there still be a job for me if I leave to take up a temporary opportunity?' For employees there was a concern with being 'out of sight and out of mind.'
- That the traditional policies and values of public sector organisations can be contrary to the idea of talent mobility creating a real barrier to uptake and success:

"We recognise the need to be creative and agile and yet the message we give out about what we value contradicts this. Instead of recognising the richness of someone's experience we reward them for how long they have been with us. Is it 20 years' experience or 1 years' experience 20 times?" Director of Children's Services and Cultures (Bury Council)

- Cost was regarded as a key issue and there was concern to ensure opportunities provided are cost neutral.
- Perceptions that opportunities in other organisations were not always meaningful and that required expectations and outcomes were not always stated or met. There was concern that previous opportunities provided in other organisations did not result in tangible outcomes for the individual or the organisation.

- There was recognition that a change of habits would be needed to encourage organisations to support talented employees to take up opportunities in other departments or organisations.
- That there would need to be a 'cultural shift' to support any talent transfer scheme.
- There was a recognised need to ensure a return on investment. It was suggested that a skills assessment before and after the temporary opportunity would be a way to support better outcomes and recognise what had been learnt and how it could be used to benefit the organisation.
- Lack of engagement with other sectors and particularly the private sector despite perceptions that this sector could provide beneficial opportunities for talented employees to develop skills, particularly in relation to commercial skills, digital skills, innovation and creativity, decision making, and new ways of working.
- The use of traditional 'secondments' to support talent development do not meet the needs of organisations in promoting ongoing and integrated talent mobility due to negative perceptions of secondments.
- That often arrangements between organisations were complex and practical issues including agreement relating to terms and conditions were seen as problematic.

Summary of findings

The interviews undertaken support the findings from the literature relating to talent management and talent mobility specifically. However, though there is a belief in the need for an increase in talent opportunities which support public service organisations to develop the skills and talent required for the future, there are real barriers to the adoption of ongoing and purposeful talent mobility across different organisations and sectors.

Importantly, the use of short term secondment type cross-organisational opportunities was not an integrated part of existing talent management strategies in the public sector organisations that form part of this project. In addition, the culture of public sector organisations which can be regarded as risk averse does not support the development of new and innovative approaches to talent mobility. There was a perceived lack of 'readiness' within organisations to embark on new approaches to employee development.

Despite this, many opportunities were identified to overcome the challenges associated with the adoption of talent mobility. A whole system approach where talent mobility is embedded into existing strategies and approaches to the management of talent throughout the employee lifecycle emerged as central to this.

INTRODUCING TEMPORARY TALENT TRANSFERS (TTT)

10 Key principles and actions to enable talent mobility:

Following on from our findings this section outlines recommendations to enable public sector organisations to successfully develop talented employees through the use of **TTT** and equally to break down the barriers identified to this approach.

1. 'Brand and market it'

A movement away from the term secondment will help pre-conceptions be avoided and the adoption of a clearly stated brand (**TTT** - Temporary Talent Transfer) will potentially help it stand out to key stakeholders and early adopters.

This can be achieved through:

- The development of a branded Facebook/Twitter or similar social media account to use as a portal to advertise the concept, list opportunities, and enable individuals/organisations to share experiences and offer hints and tips for how to maximise opportunities.
- Development of a blog where those undertaking placements share their experience and learning and engage individuals/organisations who may be interested in participating in the program.

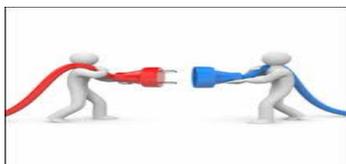


2. 'Get buy in'

As with any new initiative it is essential to ensure that key organisational stakeholders are aware of the potential benefits of increased opportunities for talent mobility and development across organisational boundaries. These individuals will champion and drive the approach forward to realisation.

This can be achieved through:

- An engagement seminar with potential key stakeholders delivered by HR to instil the benefits of this approach.
- Information sessions for managers to clarify the purpose of **TTT** and explain why this would be beneficial to them and the organisation.
- Use of regional networks and existing partnerships to identify opportunities. We anticipate this would be promoted by HR and undertaken by service leads within the business.
- Produce marketing campaign aimed at generating interest within the organisation as well as for organisations interested in participating to sell the advantages and benefits
- Share and promote early success stories to encourage participation



3. 'Align your culture'

Understand the unique cultural identity of your organisation and ensure the design of the scheme is tailored and appropriate to this. Embed the approach into existing processes and systems and make sure that behaviours are not working against adoption.

This can be achieved through:

- Incorporation of **TTT** into job descriptions, contracts of employment and induction programmes.
- Review organisational values and behaviours to promote agility and flexibility of individuals by developing their skills and talents across sectors/organisations.

4. 'Try it out'

The success of any new initiative will depend on learning lessons through the process of implementation and the ongoing review of objectives is essential to ensure the scheme delivers expected outcomes.

This can be achieved through:

- Development of a 6 month pilot where the participating organisations sign up to provide opportunities. This could be facilitated by a HR group representing the different organisations although each organisation to consider who is best placed to lead.
- North West Employers or an equivalent organisation with regional networks will enable organisational linkages and sharing of opportunities.

5. 'Set and manage expectations'

To ensure opportunities are meaningful clear expectations should be stated at the outset and measurable outcomes agreed.

This can be achieved by:

- Categorising opportunities to key skill areas e.g. commercial skills to ensure they will equip individuals with skills that are directly linked to organisational needs.
- Clear links to service plans will enable organisational priorities to be aligned to short term opportunities.
- A description of the opportunity to be provided to outline key expectations from the employing organisation, the employee and the organisation offering the opportunity. It is essential that measurable objectives are agreed before any **TTT** commences.



6. 'Partner up'

Success will depend on the development and utilisation of partnership arrangements with other organisations as the source of opportunities.

This can be achieved by:

- Organisations could utilise existing partner relationships and networks initially to offer TTT opportunities across sectors. Existing networks and links would provide the easiest source of opportunities encouraged through reciprocal arrangements.
- Further development of the scheme would include consideration of wider partnerships within the “place”, for example key investors.
- Once the pilot has been undertaken and the programme is established with tangible successes, a next step would be to market TTTs with other sectors including the private sector.
- Promote the benefits that the private sector can gain from a TTT with the public sector including political awareness, equality and diversity, managing large scale organisational change, achieving challenging savings through exploring alternative ways of working, partnership working, developing procedures to ensure adherence to legal requirements and reduce risk of litigation to name a few.
- Consider building talent transfer requirements into procurement processes when external organisations bid for work.

7. 'Let them go'

A key barrier to talent mobility relates to the issue of allowing talented individuals to take up opportunities outside of the team, the department or the organisation. There is an identified reluctance by managers to lose high performing individuals even on a temporary basis for obvious reasons. This is despite recognition of the need to encourage the development of talented individuals.

Steps to overcoming this barrier include:

- Communicating the ‘why?’ to line managers and decision makers. Encourage participation in the scheme through clear messages which outline the benefits for the individual and the organisation.
- Review of reward strategies to support and promote the development of skills through short term opportunities in other organisations
- Integration of talent mobility approaches to existing people plans, succession plans and talent mobility strategies.
- Ensure continued communication with employees during TTT so they remain connected to their employing organisation.
- Set up a TTT “agreement” – clarifying terms and conditions of employment during a TTT. We would recommend retaining staff on the same terms and conditions for the duration of any TTT for simplification.

8. 'Fill the gap'

When talented employees take up opportunities such as secondments the gap left behind can pose a practical problem for managers and acts as a further barrier preventing the adoption of talent mobility programmes within organisations.

Steps to overcoming this barrier include:

- Link release of talented individuals to succession plans using the opportunity to develop talent elsewhere within the team. This relies on the development of detailed succession plans at service level.
- Consider flexible ways of backfilling for those on a TTT rather than traditional vacancy filling.
- Managers will need to be mindful of the impact of a TTT on other team members and ensure they remain engaged and can view a colleagues TTT as positive for their own development and maximise opportunities for shared learning.
- Organisations could explore reciprocal arrangements, for example talent “swops” which provide opportunities for both partners and prevent the need to identify backfill arrangements.
- Organisations could consider the creation of a “talent pool” enabling linked talent opportunities and organisational flexibility.

9. ‘When they come back’

In order to retain talented employees and to ensure the organisation gains the most from a TTT there needs to be a planned approach when individuals return from opportunities. This approach needs to capture the learning from the opportunity, enable the employee to continue to develop the skills they have learnt, and, ensure the transfer of skills and knowledge to other employees:

This can be achieved through:

- An individual skills assessment should be undertaken before and after the TTT to measure development against the objectives and establish the level of success of the TTT.
- A plan should be developed for the return of the employee which looks at the skills learnt and how best to utilise these within the organisation. This should be clearly communicated to the employee and their view and input should be sought in making this decision.

10. ‘Review, review, review’

It is recognised that one approach to enabling talent mobility will not work for all organisations in the same way. Continuous review of the approach taken and how it fits within a constantly changing organisational context will ensure that adaptations can be made in a timely way to promote the success of the scheme.



Summary of recommendations to enable Temporary Talent Transfer		
Recommendation	Key action	Success criteria
Get buy in	Drive the programme forward through the creation of a group of key people who will make things happen	The launch of a programme driven by key organisational stakeholders
Brand and market it	Develop a clear brand and a marketing campaign which focuses on generating internal and external interest	Securing defined opportunities to offer across partners and a range of talented people
Align your culture	Speak to people to ensure your organisation is ready and incorporate into existing procedures	The identification of talented individuals and progression of opportunities
Try it out	Pilot the programme across one service area or group for a specific period of time	Measure outcomes quantitatively and qualitatively and build learning into the programme
Set and manage expectations	Make sure expectations for all parties are clearly stated and each opportunity includes measurable objectives	Consistent management of opportunities and measurement of outcomes against expectations
Partner up	Develop existing as well as new links with partners and integrate TTT into contractual arrangements	Creation of a pool of diverse partner organisations offering tangible opportunities
Let them go	Communicate the benefits and promote success stories to make the scheme attractive to managers as well as employees	Positive feedback from managers who have released employees to take up temporary opportunities
Fill the gap	Make arrangements to ensure there is an identified backfill approach. Use the gap to enable the development of others.	Creation of succession plan that provides flexibility and supports the temporary movement of people
Manage their return	Management of employee return to focus specifically on how to utilise the skills learnt during the opportunity	Skill assessments to measure development and creation of specific return plans for employees
Review	Ensure continuous review of the objectives of the programme to support its continued development	Measure outcomes and build in ongoing review to ensure the scheme remains relevant

Conclusion

We know that for public sector organisations to succeed in the future we need to be connected, more commercially and digitally minded, and effective leaders of place. These factors will be major determinants of our success or failure to deliver. Temporary Talent Transfers aim to encourage organisations to develop a broader outlook to talent development that is specifically focussed on accessing new and varied opportunities for talented individuals to generate fresh ideas and perspectives. The opportunities that lie within other organisations, particularly from different sectors and industries, is relatively unexplored and yet holds great potential to meet the needs of talented individuals as well as providing organisations with the skills they need for the future. The greatest risk to this not becoming a reality is perhaps overcoming cultural barriers that lead to managers fearing the loss of talented employees. The challenge will be to address these barriers so that there is a genuine belief that talent mobility leads to the retention, motivation and engagement of talented individuals and equally provides new skills that public sector organisations will ultimately need to rely on now and in the future.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our mentor, Gareth Hopkins, from Warrington Borough Council for his support and guidance, and the following organisations who took part in our interviews and assisted in our research:

Bury Council
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
Manchester City Council
North West Employers (NWE)
North Yorkshire County Council
Trafford Council

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