

Career Management at the British Council

The Challenge

The British Council's role is to build engagement and trust between people in the United Kingdom and other countries and to increase awareness of our nation's creative ideas and achievements. The Council employs over 7000 people in more than 110 countries, with about 1200 being UK appointed.

In 2009, a strategy was launched to double the impact of its cultural relations activities. Many of these initiatives would engage external partners rather than limit the Council to its own resources. The new objectives called for significant organisational transformation. The transformation would see some roles disappear and others would be created. Whilst it was expected that up to 30% of the UK staff would leave the organisation over the next 2 years, it was hoped that many would depart through a Voluntary Early Retirement (VER) plan or through natural wastage.

The Council recognised that many of its number were long-term career professionals and that employees affected by the transformation would be obliged to make major career decisions within a few months. Some people may wish to take advantage of the VER plan and others may want to compete for the new jobs. As an employer which recognised the importance of strong employee engagement, it knew that its people needed career management support through the approaching period of uncertainty and advice on their options. They required a service which gave practical guidance, coaching and the information needed to achieve a career plan with routes and objectives.

The Solution

Cepec Career Management was selected to work with HR Managers and propose a solution. Employees in certain affected departments in London, Manchester, Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh were all eligible for career management support. As is often the case, some departments had different requirements and priorities to others. Cepec addressed each situation and was able to offer a flexible approach. It was important to match the needs of each HR Manager and ensure optimum use of their people-assets. Over the period of six months, there were three programmes:

- Departments ran a series of workshops, where the HR Managers briefed employees on the implications of the Transformation programme and drew their attention to the in-house intranet information available to them. With guidance, employees then prepared for an in-depth one-to-one meeting with our career consultants. These meetings were attended by over 150 employees, where they received important advice on evaluating options, making key decisions and scoping a plan for the future.
- One department, based in London & Manchester, was being disbanded early and about half the roles were to be distributed elsewhere. Nearly 30 staff were given a

sector-specific programme of three meetings to clarify career and objectives, assess skills and evaluate both internal and external opportunities.

- Another department was made up of people with important and specific skills. It was vital that these skills were not lost to the future organisation and some 40 people were given a series of four half-day workshops. The workshops covered skills & achievements, CV writing, interview techniques and self promotion. The aim was to attract the right people into redeployment and add clarity to the selection process.

Throughout, the British Council was looking for three tangible results from their investment:

- Greater employee engagement
- Optimum use of "People Assets".
- Retention of the skills and experience still needed.

The Outcome

Of those staff that was offered the chance of the career management programme, 75% were enthusiastic to take advantage of the opportunity. The outcomes were of great benefit to both the employer and employee:

- It has been widely acknowledged that the initiatives resulted in an enhanced employee engagement. People have welcomed an objective career audit and it has added clarity to their career drivers. Many have gained some very necessary self-confidence. They have been able to look at the organisational transformation and identify where they might have experience and skills to offer. Others have made the decision that a career outside the British Council suits them better. For them, the important thing is that they made the decision themselves. They leave by their own choice, still loyal and proud to have been part of a great institution.
- The organisational transformation has shed jobs but has created many new ones as well. The career management programme has harvested an abundance of informed and committed candidates, with the right competencies and experience. The organisation has been able to successfully draw on its "People Assets" and make optimum use of who was available.
- The British Council is confident that it has retained more than enough of the skills and experience that will be required in the new establishment. Much of this wealth might easily have been lost without giving people the chance to audit and align their own strengths with the needs of their parent organisation.