

WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION - HOW SHOULD THE INDUSTRY RESPOND TO CHANGING ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE WORKFORCE?



Highlights from the Major Projects Association event held on **19th April 2018**

Across every industrial sector, careers and working patterns are changing dramatically and having a profound impact upon the way employers attract and retain talent. People now expect to work longer and have a greater focus on achieving work-life balance; new technology means working practices are changing rapidly; the concept of a 'job for life' has disappeared and soon perhaps the 'career for life'.

The implications for the major projects sector from these fundamental changes in working practices and expectations were explored at this Major Projects Association evening discussion. To continue to attract the best talent and create the high-performing teams of the future, the sector must evolve its approach to recruitment, working practices and cultures, knowledge transfer and personal development.

IT'S A JOB NOT A LIFE – THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Getting to the top of the greasy pole is not the sole driver for the next generation of workers. Instead, they are increasingly interested in flexible jobs that enable them to balance their lives and interests outside of work while delivering outcomes to society.

'There is a growing generation coming through our organisations who see a job as simply a job, not a life. Increasingly people are looking for flexibility in the way that they work – and I think that is a healthy thing. It is about productivity – presence is not everything.'

Douglas McCormick, Chief Executive, WYG

While people do still look at 'role-fit' when deciding on where to work we are also now seeing 'lifestyle fit' – in particular, organisational culture is a key driver when people choose where to work. Having the right cultural identity and values that align with the people you want to employ is key to building and retaining a future workforce.

People who are given more opportunities to diversify their role within an organisation stay for longer. From the perspective of company resilience this is critical, because the cost of staff turnover is very high. Failure to provide this diversity of experience can have a significant financial as well as intellectual cost.

DIVERSITY

A business should reflect the society of which it is part. It is not simply a matter of gender – although that is very important. Organisations need to deal with the unconscious biases that currently limit their balance of gender, race, sexuality, religion and disability.

The most diverse organisations will be the most successful – companies with diversity on their executive board have a 95% higher return on equity than those without. And diversity drives innovation and creativity in all aspects and types of businesses. To get this diversity of talent and thought, the major projects sector has to understand how to attract groups of people that to date have not been adequately engaged, recruited, retained or promoted.

'Diversity is about higher performing teams. We can talk about doing the right thing, but the proof is in the pie – creating a different dynamic so that we come up with ideas and are not afraid to put them forward.'

Claire Gott, UK Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, WSP

CASE STUDY

WSP has embedded a clear set of values (aligned with their approach to Corporate Social Responsibility) into their UK business strategy – this has helped to attract and retain a wider talent pool.

Humanitarian aid framework: For many staff, particularly women, the ability to contribute to humanitarian aid projects and to use their professional skills to make a tangible difference in the world, is a real driver and motivator. WSP provides each staff member with two days a year that they can use to volunteer for causes they are passionate about.

Carbon neutral strategy: The firm committed to become carbon neutral by 2025 as a driver for changing the way that staff operate in terms of the travel choices they make but also the way that teams operate. The Monday One Day scheme – where staff commit to no business travel on a Monday – has proved to increase team interaction and ensures that staff get home on time.

GETTING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Offices of the future will have to reflect the needs of the future workforce – to be flexible, fun spaces that accommodate mobile and collaborative organisations in which rank and hierarchy are no longer the prime movers.

Accommodation will have to support team working with break-out spaces and meeting rooms plus ‘lots of fun stuff’ – whether table tennis or pool tables – creating an attractive environment in which to work. Investing in better quality office accommodation helps to create a happier and healthier working environment and brings greater focus on well-being. A healthier workforce is likely to be a more productive workforce.

‘You need a blend of skills in any organisation at scale. The companies that have grown the fastest around the world – the Googles and the Apples, they have gone after the talent that can deliver what it needs to – be that from a STEM or an arts background.’

James Bryce, Strategic Workforce Planning Director, Arcadis LLP

INTELLECTUAL OSMOSIS

A shared environment also ensures that knowledge does not cluster in one team or person and so be lost when they move on. This culture of information sharing is also underpinned by simple technology tools allowing files, contacts and calendars to be routinely shared across teams. Jobs for life will not exist in the future, therefore organisations have to manage knowledge transfer as staff turnover increases. In major projects, which by definition are temporary organisations, the challenge is how to ensure that sufficient knowledge is retained to complete the project.

People should be encouraged to change their roles and have a varied career, as this is shown to make them more interested and useful. If they leave an organisation they should leave with more skills than they arrived with – because sometimes they also come back. Generational interchange will start to become critical. Probably a third to a half of current employees are going to retire in the next ten years so ways to retain and pass on knowledge, either through mentoring or coaching, are critical. This handover of knowledge must be done in the language and environment which the emerging digital natives of Generation Z understand.

‘The client organisations of the future will demand different skills and new ways of working. Not only will the skills and the workforce be different, but it will be different organisations who supply them. Not all of the key players in the industry today will be the key players tomorrow.’

Keith Waller, Senior Advisor, Infrastructure and Projects Authority

MAINTAINING CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Clients and customers value people with experience and teams that know how to get things done. But as we move to an era where jobs are not for life and in which people routinely move from employer to employer, it is critical that firms are able to retain and protect their knowledge and expertise.

Setting up both cultural and technology processes to encourage information sharing as a norm is critical, as are systems to encourage information exchange when people leave. Organisations must also get into the new habit of reminding leavers of any work restrictions that might apply so as to avoid any future litigation. The question to ask is whether everything is being done in this changing environment to protect the company’s knowledge.

‘Companies need to be more prepared to impose and enforce contractual terms to protect their institutional knowledge but they also need to build a real culture of information exchange.’

David Mendel, Senior Associate, People and Reward Team, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP

POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- As technological advances make STEM specialists redundant and there is a growing need for individuals with strong communications skills, should we be working harder to recruit individuals with Arts backgrounds?
- How do firms ensure critical information does not get lost when staff move on to new organisations – particularly in temporary organisations where staff movements can be anticipated?
- What steps should firms take to give employees new challenges and variety within the same organisation?

Chair:

Douglas McCormick, Chief Executive, WYG

Contributors:

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David Mendel, Senior Associate, People and Reward Team, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP

Keith Waller, Senior Advisor, Infrastructure and Projects Authority

Participating Organisations:

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For further information contact: Professor Denise Bower, Executive Director, Major Projects Association
t: 01865 818030 denise.bower@majorprojects.org www.majorprojects.org