Swimming against the tide

Brave and bold ideas from the world of business psychology to radically rethink traditional people management approaches
Contents

3  |  Introduction
4  |  Radical recruitment
7  |  Career changerships – a missed opportunity?
8  |  Rethinking Learning and Development
10 |  What we do
12 |  References
Introduction

This ebook is not for the faint hearted. If you’re interested in how to engage and motivate your staff, be prepared to keep an open mind. Current methods for how this is achieved are going to be questioned and challenged but not without suggesting evidence based methods for doing things better.

A number of changes are and will have a significant impact on how we engage with employees:

- There is no more job for life. On average, people currently change their job on 6 times, but new research indicated this is projected to increase to an average of 9 times.
- Developments in artificial intelligence and social robotics indicate that based on current technology, 47% of jobs (1) will significantly change in nature, automating many of the roles currently undertaken by business professionals. When technology gets to the level of being able to understand complex human communication, this is projected to increase to 63% of jobs being affected.
- Developments in technology mean thousands more people can work from home and communicate with offices on line. Employers are moving away from the model of hiring staff and hiring ‘associates’ and are shaping their workforces in line with customer and client demand. The growth of the ‘micro business’ has been exponential: in 2016, there were 2 million more businesses than in 2000 – a growth of 59%. With annual growth increasing at 3% per year, this trend is predicted to continue. In the UK now, there are 5.3 million microbusinesses accounting for 96% of all businesses (2).
- Average life expectancy has increased dramatically over the past 100 years. In 1908 when pensions were first introduced, pensions needed to last an additional 9 years, whereas now, we are expected to live an additional 23 years meaning pensions need to last more than twice as long. This makes working longer inevitable.

This ebook is here to shake things up a little – to give thought and criticism to how we do things with a view moving us all forward. If we’re all going to be working an additional 10 years, it’s in all our interests to do better.
Employee engagement starts with recruiting the right people. Focusing on strategies to engage employees is a wasted exercise if you’ve recruited people who don’t have the likelihood of ever being ‘engaged’.

Our current methods of selection are poor because they are driven by the underlying assumption the hiring organization is best placed to decide who the best candidate is for the job. Given 87% of employees are disengaged or actively disengaged in their jobs (3) and that at any one time, 47% of employees (55% if they are based in London) are thinking about changing their career, perhaps this assumption needs to be challenged? The hiring organisation may have the power to say yes or no during the selection process – but it has always been the employee who has the power once hired to fully engage – or not – with their job.

Currently, a substantial 70% of organisations DO NOT measure any return on investment from recruitment activity (5) and for those that do, they are really only measuring the average cost per hire. They do very little to assess the methods of assessment themselves. The most common method of assessment in the UK is interviews based on a CV – a method which is used by 72% of organisations in the UK. This is what is referred to as an unstructured interview and according to research, this method will predict the future performance of the employee around 14-15% of the time – meaning 85% room for improvement!

The best measure to assess the methods of selection is called ‘predictive validity’. It takes a measure of how well someone performed during selection and compares this with how they are performing in the job several years later. The best method of assessment currently, is a combination of General Mental Ability Tests (GMA – cognitive reasoning tests) and a work sample (an actual sample of the job – e.g proofreading a document if the job involves a high level of proofreading). This takes the prediction levels up to around 40%.

- CIPD
There are over 300 organizational factors which engage or disengage employees. Add in individuals differences, personality, values and motivations into the mix and it’s easy to see trying to predict it all is at best short sighted and at worst arrogant.

Organisations – certainly at the graduate recruitment phase appear to be coming around more and more to the idea of job shadowing, internships or work experience placements as a means to select and hire candidates:

‘Many employers consider that recruiting candidates who have proven their abilities during a work placement to be a more reliable way of employing graduates. Up to a third of new graduates are now recruited directly through employers’ work experience programmes and employers in sectors such as law, oil & energy, and investment banking are expecting to recruit at least half their graduates this way in 2015. Correspondingly, the number of paid work experience placements available at Britain’s leading employers has increased very substantially over the last five years’

- The graduate market in 2015, High fliers research (6)

Vanarama

“We ask candidates to come back and shadow for a day to get a feel for the job, expectations and culture. For most, it gets them excited about joining us, but for a significant number it does open their eyes to the reality! A decent number decide after the shadowing not to take the job offer, meaning we drastically reduce the risk of investing in training people who would never like or engage with the job. It costs us nothing and the person being shadowed tends to up their game – so it’s a double benefit!

- Helen King, NED Vanarama with responsibility for HR.
It surely isn’t rocket science to suggest that people make better decisions about what job is right for them when they experience it. There is certainly a significant degree and body of evidence based research highlighting this fact. A meta analysis (7) on realistic job previews (such as work shadowing) shows people who shadow jobs before taking them on are both more productive and perform better at work and subsequent levels of turnover are reduced.

More often used in the medical profession, shadowing is seen as a more critical tool for identifying the right candidates due to the costs of sponsoring medical training for the wrong people.

Concerns around confidentiality and potential competitors abusing the opportunity can be addressed legally through non compete and non disclosure agreements. In our early stage experience at ViewVo, no one has abused this privilege. People who give up their time to spend shadowing are at least starting from the mental position of being interested and seriously considering the that particular line of work. In each field, worlds are relatively small and risk to personal reputation if people find out your motives aren’t genuine is not a risk people take lightly.

In terms of cost, as highlighted by Helen King, giving people the chance to job shadow an employee as a way of learning more about the job costs nothing and the suggested reduction in turnover of up to 50% is certainly realistic. For those who spend time with prospective employees, the opportunity to share their knowledge and love of their own work is in itself motivating and rewarding. Without exception, everyone we’ve worked with who’ve had people shadow them for a day find the opportunity rewarding as it gives them the chance to meaningfully give back. What could be more rewarding than helping shape someone’s life?

Evidence for job shadowing as a form of encouraging recruitment and commitment is compelling:

In a study by Morrell and Detty Gin (2016) within the nursing profession, two groups were compared: one group had the opportunity to shadow a senior worker against another control group which had people interested in nursing but who did not participate in shadowing. The results indicated that 60% of the shadowing group planned to complete nursing education with 62% actually going on to then do so, compared to only 8% in the control group who planned to study. There were no results of those that actually went onto complete the course.

Testimonial – one day to shape your life.

“I worked as MD at a large investment bank in Canary Wharf managing over 300 people. I really enjoyed the people management side of the role, so after 20 years thought I might like to move into executive coaching. After spending a day with an executive coaching consultancy, I realised the role would be too isolating and I’d miss being part of working on team projects, targets and deliverables. I’m now working in a change management consultancy, where I help manage the people side reactions to new technology”

Paul Burleton – ex MD large investment bank
Using Business Psychology To Shape Your Organisation

Career changerships – a missed opportunity?

In 2014, there were 3 women returnship programmes. In 2017, there were 49 advertised. The explosion of these programmes lends support to the idea that offering opportunities to re-enter the workforce following a career break is a great thing to do from a business perspective.

Given the success and the PR frenzy caused by the returnship programmes for women returning to work, it is the suggestion of this ebook to highlight the massive opportunity employers have to consider and embrace the idea of ‘career-changerships’. Whilst we fully embrace and welcome the returnship explosion, we also can’t help but wonder why limit this to women who’ve once worked in the organisation or in a similar, previous role? Of the 49 offering returnship schemes, in our discussions with Changeboard, CIPD, the ABP, the BPS, BITC and AgeUk, the only programme we know of which offers professional career changes is the encore programme at Barclays.

Returnship programmes have proved popular..

“The US experience suggests that returnships benefit participants just as much as organisations. The typical scheme resembles a short-term consulting project. Returners work on CV-worthy projects which draw on their existing skills and experiences and they are paid accordingly. They can rebuild their professional confidence and skills in a supportive peer environment, receiving training, mentoring and access to corporate networks. They also get to practically test out the role and assess whether they want to return to a demanding corporate job”

– the Guardian, 2014

In our own survey of over 2000 people, the most significant barrier to changing profession was the perceived lack of skills and knowledge. The perception however doesn’t match reality: Paul Smith is a business psychologist from Wise Amigo. He’s done extensive research on several hundred competency frameworks. He’s interested in understanding the core competencies needed across a career lifespan and has identified most frameworks state and suggest broadly similar competencies. He’s identified a maximum of 32 competencies could cover all sectors/all jobs. Yes - knowledge and networks are specific to different roles, but the skills a doctor uses to build good relationships with patients are the same an accountant would use to build relationships with clients. People underestimate how transferable their skills are and forget in any job, there is a degree of adjustment and learning required.

The fact remains, 46% of people do completely change their careers at least once in their lifetime and it is our prediction with the extended working lives we’ll be living this will be a trend set to continue. Organisations have the potential to attract new sources of talent and experience, if they were to think a little more creatively about attracting and targeting different age groups, traditionally ignored.
Humans have four fundamental drivers, one of which is a drive to learn. We are curious and motivated to understand the world around us. Learning is important to us; it is one of our basic needs. It is therefore not surprising that surveys and research repeatedly show opportunities to learn and develop as being one of the main reasons employees are attracted to leave organisations.

In 2005, one of the largest studies of the factors which best predict employee satisfaction was conducted (8). It looked at over 40,000 data points from over 140 peer reviewed studies. 2 out of the top 4 factors which predicted if people were satisfied at work were L&D related: firstly whether or not their organization ‘sponsored’ them (through things like high potential or leadership development programmes) and secondly whether or not their organization had a learning and development function. If you have an L&D department – or if you work in L&D, pat yourself on the back because it’s one of the reasons employees like their jobs!

The demand is there: we know people want to learn, but how effective is the learning being delivered? In a McKinsey survey of 140 Chief learning officers, only “57% of the respondents believe that their academies are “very or fully aligned” with corporate priorities”. (9)

Likewise, in the UK, according to research by Towards Maturity, only 63% of L&D leaders agree their initiatives are delivering and supporting the needs and skills of the business.

Today’s employees know what they need to learn and 57% of them are going outside of the organisation to get it by investing their own time and money. This alone gives a strong indication of the strength of the learning drive – what it also shows us is organisations do not and can not possibly provide all the learning needs of their employees. (10)

Why are employees spending their own time and money doing this?

70% of L&D are not proactive in understanding how individuals in their organisations learn. It’s perhaps unsurprising that they struggle to engage staff. It is time for change.

- Towards Maturity, 2016
“55% of employees are thinking about changing their career in the next two years”

- London School of Business and Finance survey 2015.

The reality is, after around 10-15 years in any job, employees are (by their very ‘drive to learn nature’) driven to do something different. Often it isn’t the organization or job doing anything wrong – it is more the allure and the pull of novelty is strong. Employees leave because the learning they’ve achieved is no longer taking them forward where they are.

The acknowledgement there is no more job for life seems well understood, but the acknowledgement that people may be using the organization as a stepping stone does not yet appear to be embraced by the L&D world with L&D provision aimed squarely at what is good for the organization – not yet at what is good for the individual.

Monzo bank is doing things differently.

If you look at Monzo’s employee benefits page, loud and clear, is highlighted that in addition to the 32 days annual holiday allowance (which employees are encouraged to take):

‘You can also take an additional month of unpaid leave each year if you wish, to work on personal projects, travel further afield, learn a new language, take an intensive pasta-making course, or something else’ – Monzo Bank website.

The message Monzo is communicating with this simple statement is firstly: all learning is important. Secondly, it demonstrates they accept they can’t cater to all of the learning motivations and needs for their staff – so they give them the space and time to pursue their own learning.

The bold and brave organisations are those which understand they can offer individuals the power to develop themselves – not just through words but through action. Some organisations allocate payments of £15K a quarter to executive coaching businesses for one employee! Imagine if instead of the organisation spending their budget as they see fit - they offer employees the opportunity to spend their allocation in ways which will best help them progress their career – no matter what direction that takes. The recruiters would need to get ready for the onslaught of applications.....

L&D can’t preach the message that people need to own and be accountable for their own development if the only opportunities to learn reside within the frameworks provided by L&D. As we move away from jobs for life and towards jobs as stepping stones to something else, the L&D role will need to consider its own mindset shift towards being more of a career development specialist.
What we do

I’m on a mission to help people make better and more informed career choices. People with a better understanding of the jobs they’re going into are happier and more productive. It’s a no brainer.  

Lucy Standing

ViewVo is changing lives. We provide opportunities for people to talk to, meet with and shadow experts doing jobs they are considering. We’ve found 65% of the time, people shadow a job and love it, wishing they’d done it sooner. The other 35% of the time, people shadow a job and realise the grass isn’t greener and this isn’t their dream job.

So what? Why is this relevant to you?

Recruitment
Personality stays the same, but over time, interests, values and motivations change meaning different people will engage with your offer at different times. We can help you operationalize a shadowing programme. This will have two benefits: firstly, new hire training and turnover costs will be reduced. Secondly, the opportunities you have to raise awareness of different jobs to new audiences will offer you a PR opportunity to rival the returnship hype. I am so confident of these outcomes, any fee will be taken from savings made.

Outplacement
The pain of making people redundant will be softened by an outplacement opportunity which covers not only the CV, workshops and coaching traditionally offered, but uniquely, the chance and opportunity to shadow the job they’ve always dreamed of doing. If inspiring passion fits the bill, we are the team.

Employee development combined with CSR
We’ll work with you to select and train a group of employees to become experts and mentors in the jobs they do. We’ll charge a fee for people to learn about these jobs – but you donate time. In return, the fee we charge on your behalf is donated to charity. You develop your staff, get feedback on their skills as experts whilst helping others and helping charities fundraise. 100% of those who’ve offered their time have embraced and enjoyed the experience.
Case study highlight: The FSCS (Financial Services and Compensation Scheme)

“Thinking of a career change or doing something totally different can be scary and risky for any of us at any age. Short of an internship or secondment, job shadowing is proven to be more effective than any other form of career change learning. ViewVo gives people the confidence to take next steps - such as opening the coffee shop they’ve always dreamed about – by allowing them to try things out! They eliminate risk by giving you exclusive access to shadow and learn about your dream job before diving in.

The FSCS are one of the first organisations to embrace ViewVo’s innovative approach not just for personal development but for career transition support in times of change”.

David Blackburn, Chief People Officer

There are over 200 opportunities to shadow various experts on ViewVo with more being added as we respond to requests. Money raised either helps small businesses or is donated to charity.

Lucy Standing
BSc, MSc, CPsychol, AFBPS, MABP

Lucy is a chartered psychologist and current Vice Chair of the Association for Business Psychology (elected 2015). She is Founder of ViewVo and is also working on a project to educate students vocationally whilst at school. ViewVo was selected out of over 1000 applications as one of the top 15 finalists for ‘The Pitch’ – the UK’s largest small business competition. Prior to this, she worked in both the consulting and corporate worlds (Global Head of Recruitment).

Lucy likes meetings (especially those featuring coffee and cake) which share ideas for how you can save money and do more exciting things to help your staff and organisation. lucy@viewvo.com 07979 608 274.
1. The future of employment – how susceptible are jobs to automisation. C Frey, M Osbourne, 2013
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   http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06152/SN06152.pdf

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5. CIPD Resourcing and Talent planning survey 2017.

6. The graduate market in 2015, High Fliers Research:
   http://www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2015/graduate_market/GMReport15.pdf


8. Predictors of objective and subjective career success: a meta analysis.


10. Toward Maturity – The consumer learner at work – 2016 (log in to TM to download a copy)