

HOW WILL E-RECRUITMENT HELP LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO BECOME AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE?

By Doug Forbes

Abstract

With staff turnover rates in some organizations reaching 20%, local government's experience of some 10% looks favorable. However, in England and Wales alone, that means over 230,000 staff are recruited each year. Any move to reduce this or find faster and more effective methods of recruitment will have a considerable bearing on the cost of recruitment. As a Council also has a duty to achieve Best Value, then a Council should aim to reduce staff turnover by becoming an Employer of Choice and by using more effective methods of recruitment. In order to tackle the problem, Worklife Balance is being introduced successfully in many Councils. This is defined as balancing the needs of the individual with the requirements of the organization. This paper looks into some of the issues of this problem, as how do we attract younger staff who lack understanding of the function and purpose of local government? How do we project a positive image, show them that Councils are more responsive, wish to improve and need and value their services? Without appealing to this younger market, how else will the gene pool ever be renewed and improved?

Detailed Paper

So why should a Council aspire to becoming an employer of choice? Simply under Community Leadership powers, if councils wish to demonstrate active leadership and become one of the main catalysts within their area, it can be argued that they should become 'an Employer of Choice'. So what is an 'employer of choice'? Put simply, it is about having a positive image to citizens, members and staff. From a personnel viewpoint, this means;

- Low staff turnover
- Many unsolicited applications
- Well motivated staff
- Diversity
- Promotion and growth opportunities
- Recognition
- A future
- Rewards

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So Local government has a direct incentive to become an employer of choice. The recruitment costs alone, let alone retraining, costs authorities some £600m per year with much of that being spent on local and national advertising.

In order to tackle the problem, Worklife Balance is being introduced successfully in many Councils. This is defined as balancing the needs of the individual with the requirements of the organization. Indeed, Merton Council is often quoted as an example to the private sector in developing this practice. However, fundamentally, if Councils' images are so poor that voters will not even bother to vote, how will they ever attract the kind of staff which will make a difference? Or are we locked in a vicious cycle of decline?

So how do we attract younger staff who lack understanding of the function and purpose of local government? How do we project a positive image, show them that Councils are more responsive, wish to improve and need and value their services? Without appealing to this younger market, how else will the gene pool ever be renewed and improved?

We now have a school and university population which is increasingly computer literate, internet access and penetration in some areas is over 60% and this is being demonstrated by the number of hits which Councils receive on their websites. With some local government sites now attracting upwards of 400,000 hits per month. This is a far cry from 3 years ago when the first sites only received some 3000 hits per month. With all the pressure to produce eGovernment results, what are Councils doing to move into the new agenda?

The Employers' Organisation has grasped the new agenda firmly by operating LG Jobs, a website operated by Jobsgopublic.com. Their experience with LGCareers.com, which was named by the Guardian as one of the top ten sites on the web, shows that young people expect to use online recruitment techniques and think that those organizations who do not may not be worth working for. The experience is that some 80% of those who applied on the National Graduate Development Programme did so online.

Mick James, Deputy Head of People Skills at the EO, said that there were so many advantages in using online recruitment and in their view, local authorities need to rethink their traditional methods of recruitment.

Where Councils are actively using eRecruitment, such as in Lewisham, some 30% of all applications are now received online. This means that considerable changes in the way the Council processes its applications will be required, but it can now claim to have an electronic databank of candidates on call for short term replacement.

In moving towards fulfilling eGovernment promises, it is important for Councils to look at their web sites as a supply and distribution channel for resources. In the recent eGovernment draft strategy, ODPM has focused specifically on eProcurement. However, we are of the view that eRecruitment is more than a subset, due to its size and importance, it deserves specific attention on its own.

Will public perceptions be improved by using eRecruitment? Will it reinforce the Council's image as an employer of choice? That will depend how it is done and marketed and whether back office functions can also be improved alongside. One disappointment is that many councils are using their own recruitment site solely for advertising. On receipt of an application, they print out the form, often to reinput it into their personnel and payroll system. If these organisations wish to move to higher transactional level of eGovernment, then they should be integrating their systems.

With the deadline for IEG2 Statements being October 31st, Council HR managers have an opportunity to put eRecruitment firmly on the agenda within their Council. With the 2005 eGovernment target advancing, this is an area for inclusion within the programmes.

Sir Jeremy Beecham commented ,” We see eRecruitment as a vital practice in the modernization of Councils, which the government is actively encouraging. This will assist Councils to attract young people with relevant skillsets and demonstrate that they are modernizing and becoming employers of choice”.

Looking to the future, no doubt technological advances will develop which will mean Councils will change their practices. For instance, should local government consider using viral marketing techniques using SMS messages as a method of advertising? These can be seen as the modern equivalent of word of mouth or a chain letter.

To answer the question of how eRecruitment will help become an employer of choice, it will show that Councils are adopting the practices of the best firms and as a result will gain access to younger and more IT literate staff, so improving the general skill base and gene pool. And by becoming an employer of choice, the Council may have a better chance of retaining them and their skills.

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