



The Case of Nationwide

Background

Nationwide Building Society has seen substantial growth in its Project Management practice over the last four years. It was identified that around 100 employees needed to be recruited into Project Management roles each year to meet the needs of the growing Business Transformation division and to reduce its reliance on contractors. This can be challenging, as typically recruits are drawn from a fairly narrow geographical area in and around Swindon, which is where Nationwide's head office is based. In order to achieve these targets, the recruitment net needed to be cast wider. A lateral recruitment process was used to achieve this:

- Identify the skills and capabilities available in the market through traditional recruitment processes and avenues
- Look at other areas where required skills are present
- Devise a strategy to recruit from these other areas

One of the potential areas of recruitment identified was the military. "We were first attracted to the military by their leadership skills" explained Kevin Moylan (Head of Project Management Practice, Nationwide). Nationwide identified that the skills and capabilities requirement for the Project Management roles were a very good match with the skills and capabilities of former military personnel.

Nigel Hope (Practice Manager, Nationwide) added: "Project Management is 30% science and 70% art. The 70% is where most of the military skills come into play. The 30% is the mechanics of project management including risk assessment and Microsoft Project Management which can be taught."

Nationwide, therefore, places the emphasis on recruiting people for their skills and capabilities that match the 70% art – once recruited it then trains them on the technical skills that make up the 30% science.

Nationwide initially used an external organisation to manage the recruitment process of ex-military personnel. Due to the number of ex-military personnel that were being recruited, it was decided to develop an in-house recruitment programme.

The Process

The process developed is the Military Transition Programme which is led and managed by service leavers and business leaders as outlined below:

Preliminary Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webpage on the Nationwide website dedicated to Military Transition Programme • Provides information on the job role, recruitment and development process
Insight Evening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An opportunity for potential applicants to find out further information about Nationwide, Project Management and the job requirements. • Aimed at delivering information as well as expectation management of applicants so all parties are aware of what is on offer and what is required. • Over 60 officers attended the last Insight Evening and it was jointly promoted with the Officers' Association.
Submit Application Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application is sifted by ex-military personnel and ratified by senior management • Received over 65 applications following the last Insight Evening which were of a very high calibre.
Assessment Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of group activities, case studies and an interview with a panel. • Aimed to assess their project intelligence (ability to think like a project manager)
Commercial Awareness Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to instil commercial skills and project management processes and mechanics as it applies to Nationwide • The duration of the training is around 17 days which concludes with a two day assessment of their learning
Mentoring & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate a buddy or a mentoring system for the first 6-12 months after the initial assignment • Aim to support employee development and embed them into the organisation culture and systems

The Outcomes & Benefits

Nationwide currently employs around 55 ex-military personnel in Project Management roles. Another cohort of six ex-military joined in February 2016 with a further three joining in July 2016.

According to Kevin Moylan one of the key benefits of the programme to the Society is the new recruits' strong leadership skills. By directly recruiting talented and skilled ex-military personnel through the Military Transition Programme the senior leadership team has seen a reduction in the costs associated with hiring contractors.

The Military Transition Programme is also a significant part of Nationwide's Corporate Social Responsibility agenda. As a result of Nationwide's successful work in recruiting ex-military personnel, the Society received the Silver Award of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in 2014.

The programme has received wide interest from the private and public sector as well as influential military organisations.

The Costs & Challenges

There are of course costs involved with the programme. As well as time and staff resources allocated to designing and developing the programme, there are costs associated with organising and running the insight events such as logistics and conference venue hire. The commercial awareness training also incurs costs as recruits will be based away from the office and may need accommodation and travel. Furthermore, those who have not carried out a Microsoft project management course will need to attend training which also has a cost.

One of the challenges is managing expectations. These highly skilled employees who will in time be part of and lead major projects will perhaps need a little more time to settle in and adapt to a very different culture; developing and growing into their roles. Also, the new recruits will have to adapt to working in a corporate environment – disregarding their military ranks and the distinct and strict hierarchy they have been used to.

“It is important for organisations to invest time in identifying what their skills and capability requirements are” Kevin Moylan adds. “They need to assess whether these skills and capabilities are available within the military. They are then in a position to understand which service and which area within that service they need to focus on in terms of recruitment.”

Former Army Officer Nick Apps (Practice Manager, Nationwide) explains that honesty is an important part of the process: “Nationwide has been very clear in communicating the message that we are not doing ex-military personnel a favour, we are doing this because we need their skills and capabilities.”

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Moving Forward

Nationwide has developed a programme that has been tried and tested successfully. The programme structure allows the business to expand or minimise it as required. The Project Management Practice plans to continue to run two Insight Evenings each year and the target is to recruit 15 ex-military employees per year. This will enable Nationwide to effectively help the new recruits transition into Nationwide and provide them with commercial training.

The successful recruitment of ex-officers within the Business Transformation division of Nationwide has meant that other divisions of Nationwide will be looking at replicating this programme.