EMPLOYERS
NETWORK

#militaryisgoodforbusiness

OA
OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

The Case of Network Rail

Background

The UK government published its National Infrastructure Plan for Skills in September 2015. This plan recognised the significant shortfall of skilled workforce that is required to deliver UK's planned infrastructure projects. As one of the key organisations affected by this skills shortage, Network Rail started to look at wider opportunities to recruit people into their organisation.

As part of this exercise, Network Rail began a process to recruit more effectively and widely from the ex-military community. Chris Ackerman (Programme Manager, Network Rail) explains that the process started by discussing with Officers' Association a way in which to skills map the military skills against those needed at Network Rail.

The Process

The skills mapping process undertaken by the Officers' Association in conjunction with Network Rail is outlined below:

Role Identification

- Identify key roles to be skills mapped
- 10 roles were identified

Developing a Skills Framework

- Use the Job Descriptions for the roles as a starting point to list the skills, qualifications, and competencies required
- Discussions with HR and Line Managers to refine the skills framework
- Four groups of skills and competencies were identified in the framework - Technical, General, Leadership/ Management, and Behaviours

Skills Validation

- Interviews with Network Rail employees currently in the roles identified above as well as supervisors/line managers
- Identify key skills needed for the roles based on the interviews

Skills Map against Military

- Using courses and training that are underatken by officers in the Army, the skills sets and qualifications of the officers were matched against the Network Rail skills framework

The Outcomes & Benefits

The skills validation process revealed that General, Leadership/Management and Behaviours were as important as technical skills when recruiting and selecting people for these roles. This was an important step in aligning the needs of the role with that of the recruitment strategy.

The skills mapping process resulted in developing a framework that indicated the alignment of the skills required by Network Rail with the skills of the military. A RAG[1] (Red, Amber, and Green) code was developed to indicate this alignment. Chris Ackerman states that the skills map helps understand the 'skills package that people who are coming in have, both from a recruitment perspective and their potential training and development requirements'.

As Aaron Gracey (Armed Forces Engagement Manager, Network Rail) explains, the benefit of this process is that it can allow Network Rail to target the right individual with the right skill sets for these roles. This in turn would mean a more focussed recruitment and training strategy. A long term potential benefit of this, Aron mentions, is that aligning the skills of Network Rail and potential recruits might mean that, they will stay with the organisation longer. This will then result in reduced staff turnover and reduction of associated recruitment and training costs.

[1] Red: It is rare for military personnel to be skilled in this area – requires training
Amber: Some military personnel will be skilled but may lack experience and require context specific training
Green: High confidence that majority of military personnel will be skilled in this area

Project Manager Assistant (Band 5)			
Technical	General	Leadership / Management	Behaviours
Indicative Formal Qualifications Tech, PM and Other	Project Governance/ Controls Knowledge and Application	Continuous Improvement	Customer Driven and Focused
Health and Safety in Construction Environment	General Communication Skills	Change Management	Accountable
Health and Safety in Rail Construction Environment	Evidence based analysis	Decision Making	Challenging
CDM Regulations	Problem solving	Self Awareness; Ability to Identify Personal areas for Dev	Working in Collaborative Contractual Environment
Possession Planning and Working in Possessions	Report Writing	Articulate information confidently and credibly	Leads by Example
General Construction Project Management	Operational Capability	Stakeholder Management	Respect for others
Working in Multidisciplinary Rail Environment (PWay, S&C, Signals and Comms, Building and Structures)	Schedule Adherence	Managing information	Reliability
Delivery to Cost, Time & Quality	Prioritisation of Work	Co-ordination and planning of small teams	Ethically Driven, Integrity
Commercial Management - Developing and Letting Contracts.	Personal Administration	Project resource management	Loyalty to Team and Network Rail Policy
Construction Specific Contractual Knowledge	Negotiation skills		Communicating effectively
Commercial Management - Managing Contractual Relationships	Presentational skills		Multi-tasking
Financial Management; Forecasting, Adherence to FFR, Change Control, P&L	IT skills - Excel, Word, Powerpoint, Outlook		Effective time management
Managing Contractors/ Sub-Contractors	Action planning		Self motivating
Managing Design Development	Ethics training		Process thinking
Use of MSO Windows Applications			

The Costs & Challenges

The skills mapping process undertaken by Network Rail is not without its costs and challenges. Chris Ackerman mentions that the greatest costs were resource and time. Employees at Network Rail had to support, take part, and manage this process over and above their job roles. This meant progress was not always consistent and heavily influenced by other workloads and priorities.

Aaron Gracey also mentioned that another key challenge was to engage frontline teams and supervisors from the outset of the project rather than it being a purely Human Resource based exercise. Allowing frontline teams to review the skills to develop the initial skills framework may involve challenging prevalent norms and assumptions. However, this process will ensure team acceptance of the skills framework as well as ensuring that the skills identified are relevant for the roles and the organisation.

The military skills mapping phase also had its challenges. As Keith Spencer (Business Development Manager, Officers' Association), who carried out this task explained, due to tight delivery deadlines to complete the mapping, the Army was the only Service used in this exercise. Keith identified key branches within the Army (Royal Engineers, Royal Mechanical Engineers, and Logistical Core) which would contain the skills that are more aligned with the needs of Network Rail. More time and resource allocation would enable expanding these into the other Services to get a more detailed representation of where skills matches might prevail. For any other organisation considering a similar process to develop an effective military recruitment programme, Keith has the following advice, 'know what your business need is and bear in mind that the effort and time put into this would reflect the quality of the product you end up with'.

"Aligning the skills of Network Rail and potential recruits might mean that they will stay with the organisation longer."

Aaron Gracey, Network Rail

Moving Forward

The skills mapping exercise facilitates the way forward in effective recruitment at Network Rail. However, it is still a work-in-progress. Network Rail are planning to develop a ranking system to prioritise the skills and qualifications needed for potential Network Rail employees in specific projects and roles, thereby refining the skills framework further.

The Officers' Association

Bristol | Leeds | London | Portsmouth

www.officersassociation.org.uk

© 2016 Officers' Association. All rights reserved.

OA
OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION
Life beyond the Services