

Bending over Backwards – Flexible Approaches to Career Management in Organisations

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This work looks at introducing a flexible approach to organisational career development. Examining career development initiatives within many organisations reveals a focus on vertical progression, management development and fast tracks (Russel 1991; Baruch 2004) In academic literature and government legislation reveals an increased need for work life balance and focus on leisure and flexible working for families (Schein 1996; Bradley, Erickson et al. 2000).

In this study a sample (n = 606) of UK employees career anchors were assessed. This work showed that Lifestyle (37%), Functional Expertise (16%) and Sense of Service (14%) were the highest ranking anchors, with General Management (41%) and Creativity (25%) the lowest ranking for these individuals. This would suggest that organisations need to move on from focusing on management development initiatives and view careers in a broader sense.

A smaller study (n= 35) was carried out with civilian staff in a UK police force. Schein's career anchor model was used as a basis for introducing a flexible approach to career development. When carrying out annual appraisals line managers were encouraged to look at individuals career anchors and discuss what was important to that individual in terms of their career. Alternative development activities were considered outside of traditional management routes. Organisational commitment and job satisfaction data was gathered before and again 3 months after the discussions. Qualitative data was also gathered from the individuals and their line managers to evaluate the process.

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