

Agenda Item 9

Executive Board Meeting
4 June 2014

Memo No 11/14

POST-FILLING AND PROMOTION SURVEY

Purpose

1. To inform the Executive Board about the research commissioned by the HR Management Board (HRMB) to further explore staff attitudes to the FC's post-filling and promotion procedures.

Background

2. It was identified through analysis of the 2011 Staff Survey results that there were consistently negative responses to questions about the fairness and transparency of the FC's post-filling and promotion procedures. This had also been a theme from previous Staff Surveys.
3. In order to explore this further, the HRMB commissioned Forest Research to carry out a survey, open to all FC staff, to assess the level of staff satisfaction with the post-filling and promotion procedures and to improve understanding for the reasons behind the current level of staff dis-satisfaction.
4. Specifically, the FR survey was designed to enable the HRMB to:
 - Understand the experience and perceptions of staff;
 - Identify areas of improvement relating to policy, process and practice; and,
 - Provide evidence to inform the development of refreshed post-filling and promotion strategies.
5. FR carried out the online survey in August 2013. Over 750 members of staff from across the whole organisation and across all the Pay Bands responded to the survey (30% of the workforce).
6. Several clear themes were identified from the responses received from staff and are summarised below. The full report is available on request should EB members wish to see it.

Key Themes

Management Patronage

7. The most significant theme identified and the most common complaint was management patronage i.e. managers making decisions on post-filling and promotion and then using the established processes to rubber-stamp their decisions. Survey respondents perceived the rules being bent, broken or flagrantly ignored. Many of those who responded felt that staff were manipulated and attended an interview in good faith, only to find that the competition was never really open. This was perceived as neither fair nor transparent. Other issues around management patronage are covered under paragraphs 8, 11, 17 and 18.

The Interview System

8. There were several aspects to this, including the view that the interview carries undue weight with insufficient consideration by the interview panel of past performance, PMS results, potential, ability to learn, etc. The competency based system was criticised as too narrow and tick box focussed and open to abuse by those able to invent experiences. Inclusion of practical tests was criticised as stressful and not clearly contributing to the results in a transparent way. Many respondents expressed that panels should have independent members as a safeguard to avoid management patronage. HR membership of panels was seen as important to ensure that fair processes were followed and to eliminate management patronage and bias. HR information knowledge and training was seen as important for both panel members and applicants.
9. Timely and constructive and useful feedback after the interview was perceived as vitally important but was reported to be of poor quality, if it happened at all.
10. The short timescales allowed for applications and the protracted post-filling process was of concern to many members of staff.
11. The quality of job specific information was raised, with job descriptions often being viewed as being defined and manipulated in such a way that only certain individuals could apply i.e. management patronage. The adoption and implementation of competencies received mixed views.
12. The online recruitment system received negative feedback.

Recruitment Restrictions

13. Internal only post-filling was viewed as problematic by some respondents who perceived under-qualified or inexperienced staff being put into unsuitable roles. External candidates were viewed as bringing in valuable skills, ideas and experience.
14. Many staff who responded highlighted the need to offer more flexible working options to encourage people to apply for roles.

Promotion

15. There was some support expressed by respondents for an open promotion system similar to the old 'shelf' system. There was a strong perception that people applying for higher graded posts within their own business unit were at an unfair advantage.
16. Forest Research's promotion procedures received a large number of detailed criticism, including creating tension within teams, blockage or lack of recognition by managers, poor guidance and criteria and the infrequency of Boards.

TRA, FTAs and STTAs

17. Temporary Responsibility Appointments were viewed negatively by some respondents because they were often awarded without open competition, often extended beyond the six month limit and at the end of the appointment the incumbent was very likely to be given the job, even if advertised. This again was viewed as management patronage.
18. Again, Short Term Temporary Appointments were viewed suspiciously by some staff as they are made without fair and open competition, sometimes renewed repeatedly and then made permanent. Sometimes the job was advertised but it was perceived as ear-marked for the temporary post holder i.e. management patronage.

Action Plan

19. The HRMB has discussed and developed an action plan to address many of the issues as outlined above. For example, work is already underway to review and change the FR promotion procedures, provide new training for interview panel members, change the procedures for providing candidates with feedback, etc.
20. EB members will remember that HR membership of interview panels was removed to reduce the cost of HR to the business. Therefore, it is not an issue that is being re-considered.

Risk Assessment

21. Postfilling and promotion procedures receive consistently negative feedback in Staff Surveys. Taking action now based on feedback from staff should alleviate the risk of being perceived not to take this issue seriously.
22. The main risk is that the most significant theme identified in the work carried out by Forest Research is management patronage. This will require action by senior managers in the component parts of the FC business.

Communications issues

23. The results of the research and the subsequent action plan will be shared with staff and a Communications Plan is under discussion with HR Business Partners.

Recommendations

24. The Executive Board is asked to:
- note the outcome of the research into postfilling and promotion procedures;
 - note that the HRMB has subsequently developed an action plan and that this will be communicated to staff;
 - consider how to take alleviate occurrences of management patronage in the different parts of the FC business.

Jean Lindsay
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