

TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY

Head of Organisational Development

Currently the company has 40 apprentices, mostly split between level 3 and 5, with a couple of candidates at level 7. There have been 75 apprentices over approximately the last 5 years at the telecommunications company, however the number of apprentices on the scheme has increased in the last six months in part due to the ongoing changes in work expectations following the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE CHALLENGE

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, the face of work and employees' expectations drastically changed. The 'Great Resignation' is ongoing with workers resigning due to wage stagnation amid the rising cost of living, limited opportunities for career advancement, hostile work environments, lack of benefits, inflexible remote-work policies, and long-lasting job dissatisfaction.

To retain top talent, employers must work hard to ensure their employees feel valued and that their needs are met. The Head of Organisational Development at the telecommunications company we spoke to said that the management and leadership apprenticeship scheme aids retention in two ways:

1. Nurturing and retaining employees

By inviting employees onto the scheme they are more likely to stay if they are getting good development opportunities, feel like they're getting good exposure within the company to senior leaders, and ultimately feel more valued.

2. Creating better managers

Leadership management is becoming even more of a priority now – following the pandemic people consider where and how they work, and their line management is a big factor impacting people's experience in the workplace. By training people to be better managers you improve employees' experience across the board and those positive management strategies trickle down throughout the organisation.

“ Because it's part of an offer for existing employees, so we very much position this as a really good development opportunity, an opportunity to get some exposure. ”

HOW MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP APPRENTICESHIPS ARE USED WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

At the telecommunications company, due to the technical requirements of the business, apprenticeships are split into two groups. One group is focussed on hiring graduates and apprentices via traditional programmes i.e., cohorts from universities. In the other group, which involves the management and leadership apprenticeship, the apprentice budget is used to upskill existing employees in management skills. The reason behind this approach is that it is challenging to hire people with the technical skills, so they hire based on that first, and then after those have been established and the person has management responsibilities, they are then upskilled for those.

As well as improving retention, another benefit of the management and leadership apprenticeship is building role agility into the organisation. The company is trying to move people away from thinking about their career as a linear progression. People get frustrated because they think they can only progress if their boss leaves, and the scheme can be used to try and get people to think about experience and skills more broadly and how they are transferable. For example, someone on a level 5 programme could be encouraged to think about how their current skill set can apply in different contexts to build agility into the organisation. Having people in roles who understand how different areas of the business work strengthens the organisation as they can streamline processes and come up with new solutions for how the organisation can function better as a whole.

All the apprentices in the different levels are held to the same standards. There are differences between the groups in terms of role experience. Level 3 are up and coming managers with a greater appetite to prove themselves and so the speed of learning is faster. Level 5 tend to have more complex roles and are dealing with more issues, so the depth of discussion is different. Both groups are treated the same but there are different expectations in terms of outputs.

THE IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP APPRENTICESHIPS

Some of the impacts of the management and leadership apprenticeships include the following:

Testing new initiatives

Groups on the scheme provide a hotbed of learning to pilot and give feedback on new schemes i.e., hybrid working.

Trickle down learning

The management and leadership apprenticeship is a structured and comprehensive programme and while only 40 people are apprentices on it, those employees manage a combined 400 people and so with a relatively small group you can have quite a profound impact. In the organisation they have seen and heard things anecdotally being played back from content and can see it being applied down through the teams.

Empowered managers

While it is still early days for concrete numbers, they have noticed that those on the scheme submit fewer tickets to HR requesting support with employee relations issues. Those on the scheme appear to be more empowered to have the necessary conversations and as issues are being nipped in the bud, they aren't progressing to bigger problems that require HR intervention.

While it's still early days to see the full impact of the management and leadership apprenticeship for this cohort, groups that the telecommunications company have previously invested in have employees that are disproportionately more engaged, promoted and generate great ideas, which shows that the development pays off.

“ Of our top performing managers, you can see a bias towards those people who we're investing in. ”

“ Where are the great successes coming from in terms of some great diversity / development / volunteer stories? Again, there's a disproportionate weighting to those good news stories coming out of areas where we invest in. ”

FUTURE APPRENTICESHIP PLANS

The company has seen the benefit of investing in employees in the past and will continue to do so.

ONE KEY SKILL FOR FUTURE

A deeper dive on emotional intelligence foundation around psychology i.e., how people work, resilience and wellbeing. People work in a more dispersed manner now, so how do managers manage the wellbeing and resilience agenda?

FINAL COMMENTS

What makes the difference in this space is finding a provider that you can trust and relate to as they have wide exposure to your best employees so there needs to be a real trust. You need to work with someone really professional to encourage, stretch and challenge the employees in a good way. There needs to be a match of values, the provider needs to be more passionate about the training than the company receiving the training. If a trainer isn't bringing the content to life the provider should be proactively seeking to resolve that. A good provider has higher standards than you in the learning space.