Briefing

Top Talent Cardiff 2020
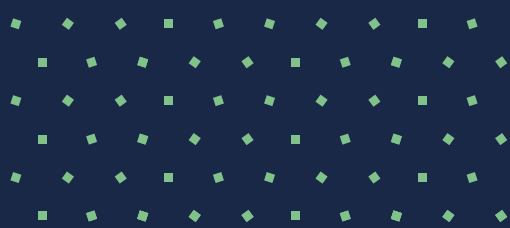
Developing people in a pandemic,

Group A

October 2020

Socitm

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At Socitm, we are passionate about harnessing and nurturing talent

We are committed to taking an active role in encouraging and empowering individuals to reach their potential and become the innovative, collaborative, bold and imaginative leaders the public sector needs to thrive in these disruptive times.

That's why we created Lead, a growing community where members are afforded a pathway towards continuing development and personal growth. Lead has been designed to attract, develop and retain the talented people the sector needs within a framework that is supportive, altruistic and authentic.

We are creating a new paradigm of leadership that values empathy, communication and collaboration. Public sector leaders need to be excellent communicators with a rich understanding of how listening, learning, sharing and challenging can improve lives and communities. Lead brings together a range of initiatives and opportunities designed to build confidence, develop resilience and inspire passion among a diverse talent pool with the ability to affect positive organisational and cultural change.

As part of Lead, we offer development programmes through our unique, in-house Leadership Academy. Devised and delivered in partnership with QA Training, Empowering Women (EW), Top Talent (TT) and Senior Leaders are initiatives that develop people both personally and professionally. These specialist programmes are each CPD accredited and – together with regular webinar sessions – harness, stretch and promote the skills and talent essential to effective contemporary leadership.

Nadira Hussain

Leadership development and research director, Socitm

Introduction

The Socitm Top Talent programme which started in Cardiff in February 2020 was, like almost everything else in the world, affected by the coronavirus pandemic. It began with face-to-face meetings in February but participants presented their findings to the society's online President's Week conference in June, rather than a physical audience.

However, the pandemic made the cohort's focus – the security of flexible and homeworking – into perhaps the most significant current issue for public sector IT. The challenge (see next page) had been set by Socitm partner IP Performance based on the idea that employers might eventually be required to offer flexible working, rather than that people across the world would be forced to do so. "Covid-19 wrote the business case for us," marketing director Gareth Williams told President's Week.

The Cardiff cohort was split into three groups, each of which chose a different aspect of the issue to examine. This Inform briefing covers the experiences and findings of Group A.

Project brief:
the challenge

"To support this new legislation* and enable the rise in flexible, mobile/roaming and homeworking, public sector organisations must guarantee and secure the availability of suitable technology to allow workers to perform their roles regardless of location or device and without impacting productivity or user experience."

In July 2019, Conservative MP Helen Whately introduced a bill to Parliament that would make flexible working the default for employees, although it was not adopted by the government and did not become law.

Group A members

Meleri Jones
Workforce and capability manager, Office of the Chief Digital Officer, Welsh Government

Sara Jones
Senior policy officer, Welsh language, Welsh Government

Mark Keenan
Solutions architect, Xentrall

Duncan Ross
Senior network engineer, IP Performance

Anthony Williams
Digital transformation officer, Gwynedd Council

Some members of the group work for organisations that do not allow them to be quoted.

Programme format

1. **An initial two-day group workshop, held in Cardiff in February, at which the challenge project was announced. This was just one element of the workshop, which also included a range of management training, discussion and networking.**

2. **A one-to-one professional coaching session lasting an hour, delivered by telephone or video-call.**

3. **Work on the group's challenge project, which took place virtually.**

4. **Two concluding days which took place online, the first of which was focused on training but also included discussion of the presentation, the second finalising the presentation and delivering it virtually at the President's Week conference on 12 June.**

5. **Participants attended a virtual graduation ceremony on 16 July.**

Working

Members of the group signed up for reasons including interest in leadership training and the specific topics covered, as well as recommendations from others. "They had really enjoyed the course and found it influential in how they work," says Anthony Williams of a colleague who had been part of an earlier Top Talent cohort.

The initial two-day course helped form the team into a unit, particularly a social night out at Asador 44, a Spanish tapas and wine bar in Cardiff. Duncan Ross says team-building over the two days avoided being "cringy" like many such exercises, adding that the one-to-one coaching session was particularly useful.

Following this, physical distance then the coronavirus pandemic meant that the rest of the work took place remotely. The group had virtual meetings to discuss how they would work and who would do what, with each person allocated with specific responsibilities based on their strengths.

The group used Microsoft Teams and email for collaboration, with video calls being particularly helpful, and benefitted from having a mix of organisations represented. But members reckon the remote collaboration would not have worked as well without the initial two days together. "I think it would have been a bit difficult if we'd not met," says Duncan Ross. "We were all getting along fairly well."

Findings

Group A considered a range of smarter working options for a fictional North Council with 4,500 staff, both office-based and working in the community. The council has seven offices with limited existing capacity for homeworking, as well as issues on security and staff culture, with the latter including reluctance by some staff to adopt new ways of working.

The group set seven business outcomes to consider options against:

› Staff wellbeing
› Smart working
› Location strategy
› Attract the best talent
› Future-proofing the workplace
› Delivery of services
› Value for money

More remote and homeworking could improve wellbeing, help with future-proofing, reduce environmental impact by leading to fewer offices and less travel, and allow North Council to employ people who do not live within daily commuting distance. But the group felt that value for money was vital, so it calculated the cost of each of the four options it considered in-depth.

Assessing the remote working options

Adapted from Top Talent Group A's presentation to President's Week

	Time to complete	Cost	Advantages	Disadvantages
Do nothing	None	Nil	› No additional cost	› At least a quarter of staff would have to be furloughed › Backlog of work would form › Outcomes would not be achieved
Migrate to Microsoft 365	Three months	£2.775m	› Outcomes partly met › Moderate levels of change › Manageable use of IT resources	› Limited access options › Would require more bandwidth › Significant training required › Reduced productivity
Migrate to Microsoft Cloud (shortlisted option)	18 months	£4.71m	› Reduces infrastructure costs › Digital transformation › Introduces single sign-on	› Significant change management › More training required › Long implementation time › More expensive
Hybrid on-premise/cloud (best option)	Six months	£1.561m	› Moderate levels of change › Compatible with existing infrastructure › Introduces single sign-on › Moderate cost	› Requires training and expertise › External input required for configuration

Summary of options

Having considered the four options, the group shortlisted the Microsoft Cloud and hybrid on-premise and cloud software options, and recommended that North Council choose the latter.

"The Microsoft cloud solution looked promising with its focus on digital transformation and security, however the cost and requirements of moving all infrastructure to the cloud made it a very large undertaking," said Duncan Ross during the President's Week presentation. "The hybrid solution looked to be a realistic way of getting the benefits of the cloud while not dropping all on-premise investment." It would also allow continuing use of legacy software and less dependence on one supplier, he added.

The group made recommendations for a specific (if fictional) council to give the work more structure. "The project brief was quite loose," says Ross, speaking later. "We had to put structure into it ourselves."

However, he adds that North Council is typical of many local authorities, and the hybrid model would work well for many as it allows use of cloud computing without throwing away everything already in place. The group also decided it was more useful to compare models of service than suppliers within the limited scope of the exercise, and as members of the group have experience of Microsoft products and services, these were used in the options.

"The project brief was quite loose. We had to put structure into it ourselves"

Duncan Ross

Outcomes

Members of Group A reported a number of benefits from taking the Top Talent course, including boosts to their confidence, good training for leadership, contact development, experience in building a business case and trying things outside their comfort zones.

Anthony Williams says he particularly welcomed the opportunity for self-reflection and learning about different styles of leadership and organisation in other local authorities. Although not immediately relevant to his current job, working on the main task has widened his horizons: "It has helped me understand the journey our organisation is on in terms of IT infrastructure."

About this briefing

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