

Talent Management in Scotland's Public Services: Implications for Leadership Development

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Abstract

Building from the outcomes from the Christie Commission and the Scottish Government's response, it is clear that there is a pressing need to adopt a new and very different approach to talent management and leadership development which underpins the delivery of the public services in Scotland. There is a compelling case now to establish a cross-public service approach to talent management. This would apply to talent at every level across organisations, with a clear focus on the values, attitudes and behaviours of those delivering public services to position service users at the centre of service design. In doing so it is crucial to continue to be aware of the many interests involved and to learn the lessons from other models that have been tried in the past. As a consequence of this, a collaborative research project has been undertaken by the author with inputs from Dr. Kirsteen Grant of Edinburgh Napier University and the Improvement Service.

A survey was conducted in late 2015 and a series of 20 semi-structured interviews with those responsible for talent management and leadership development across Scotland's public services. The evidence reveals that talent management in Scotland still tends to focus on the development of generic knowledge skills and competences for operational management. Such an approach inhibits development which is responsive to key drivers in the Scottish public management environment. Contemporary talent management in Scotland has to respond to the dynamic public management environment by interpreting the future leadership and management development requirements of the public sector (latent needs).

The Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (The Christie Commission) (2011) recommended implementing new inter-agency training to reduce silo mentalities, drive forward service integration and build a common public service ethos. There is scant evidence of progress on this aspiration. More specifically, the wider adoption of these approaches would provide opportunities for public service staff to: optimise skills, knowledge and expertise, and be supported in further development; reconnect with the purpose of their work; and express a strengthened public service 'ethos', based on enabling, empowering and improving the lives of people and communities.

The findings of the research supports the view that the Scottish Government, local government and relevant public service organisations need to develop a systematic and coordinated approach to workforce development and, in particular, should: consider how the educational and development infrastructure across the different elements of the public service could be better coordinated; bring together leadership and management development into a single cross public service development programme; develop a competency framework to apply to all public service workers which focuses on the skills required for delivering outcomes in collaboration with delivery partners and service users; and ensure inter-disciplinary training and development modules are included in all professional training for public service. There is also a need to embed and expand a shared commitment to building collaborative leadership capacity and grow flexible development opportunities (such as secondments, action-learning and mentoring), pool resources and improve outcome focus.

The paper will provide detail on the findings of this research.

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