



## A new business-workforce planning tool for uncertain times

Wendy Hirsh, Principal Associate

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### Working together

IES provides a unique evidence-based consultancy service for clients in the private, public and voluntary sectors:

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**Local councils are right at the sharp end of public sector spending cuts and radically re-thinking what their communities need and how services can best be delivered for the public good. In this context, they need to reposition workforce planning within a correspondingly broader framework.**

IES has worked with and sponsored the PPMA (Public Sector People Managers' Association) in addressing these challenges at a practical level. As one strand of the PPMA's work on the future public sector workforce, Sue Evans of Warwickshire County Council, Leatham Green of East Sussex County Council and Wendy Hirsh from IES have developed the Business-Workforce Dialogue Tool, with valuable help from colleagues in other councils. Although designed with councils in mind, much of the tool would be just as useful for other types of organisation.

The key features of the Business-Workforce Dialogue Tool are:

- It is broad and integrative, covering the big issues of purpose and priorities, finance, organisational models, culture, leadership and change management as well as the traditional issues of future workforce supply and demand.
- The two threads of risk and evidence run through the tool as a reminder not to jump to solutions without checking their likely effectiveness and sustainability.

- The format is very simple and intentionally brief. Each topic is framed in terms of a set of key questions on just one page, so you can easily scan it at a glance. It complements more detailed approaches to workforce planning, such as the IES Workforce Planning Guide (available at [www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs)).
- It is very flexible to use. The clear, modular structure offers different start points and the chance to select your own priority topics. It has been designed for different sizes and types of council and for planning discussions at different levels within an organisation (from top team down to Directorate or service unit).
- It therefore supports dialogue in formal or informal settings and with varied stakeholders. It helps HR/OD people facilitate open-ended discussions with managers and Members, as well as structure formal planning processes or service reviews.

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IES has taken on a wide range of new projects in the last six months, including:

- Assessing the impact of the regional 'Health Coaching for Behavioural Change' pilot for NHS East of England.
- Undertaking our second survey of the bar profession for the Bar Council.
- Carrying out a strategic assessment of learning and development within the Home Office.
- Conducting an online survey of recent qualifiers on securing and retaining employment for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. The results of the survey have now been published by the college.
- For the University 21 Network we are preparing a paper on workforce planning for academic staff including talent management and leadership development processes. This research will build upon good practice outside HE as well as initiatives undertaken within the Network.
- We have been helping Mersey Care NHS trust review their occupational sickness rate to examine the causes of absence and potential ways of reducing it.

Our latest HR Network member paper, *Organisational Values and the Role of HR: A review of current thinking*, will be available to the public in September 2013. This paper explores the current thinking on establishing and embedding organisational values and the part that HR has to play in these processes.

IES research was included in a report published by CIPD: *Employers are from Mars, young people are from Venus: Addressing the young people/jobs mismatch*, by K Rüdiger.

Peter Reilly chaired the HR Directors Summit 2013 in Birmingham, and a session at the PPMA conference Prosperity during difficult times.

Look out for forthcoming IES report *The Palace: Perspectives on Organisation Design*, which will be published exclusively for HR Network members this summer, and released for purchase at the end of the year. The report will use the story of an old palace to consider the challenges of design in a complex and highly-connected world.

Dilys Robinson chaired Engage for Success's annual Employee Engagement Summit in London this April.



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Early testers of the tool say it is both highly relevant and intuitively usable.

Sue Evans, Head of HR and OD at Warwickshire County Council, leads the working group and has piloted the use of the tool in her own council:

*"As we review what we do and how we do it, not just for less money but differently, I find this tool can help to open the debate and keep it focused, to frame the most relevant questions and support service reviews. Above all, it can position HR/OD at the heart of the change and transformation process as supporter, challenger, confidant and facilitator."*

A PPMA/IES workshop for HRDs and strategic workforce planners, hosted by London

Councils on 26th June, gave a larger group the opportunity to work with the tool and explore its current and future use. Its clarity and flexibility were welcomed and the group felt it could help to frame a wide range of conversations with varied stakeholders including Members, Unions and employees as well as managers and leaders.

The tool is free to download from the IES website at [www.employment-studies.co.uk/dialoguetool](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/dialoguetool) or for PPMA members from the Knowledge Bank at [www.ppma.org.uk](http://www.ppma.org.uk).

For more information and also to give feedback on your experience of trying the tool for yourself please contact Wendy Hirsh at [wendy.hirsh@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:wendy.hirsh@employment-studies.co.uk) or Sue Evans at [sueevans@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:sueevans@warwickshire.gov.uk).

# How workforce studies can give valuable insights

Dilys Robinson, Principal Research Fellow

**During 2012, IES carried out a study of the Family Nurse workforce on behalf of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) National Unit. The brief was to explore workforce issues, especially recruitment, retention and job satisfaction, amongst Family Nurses (FNs) and their Supervisors. The study included an online survey, focus groups, telephone interviews and an analysis of workforce data from the FNP database, where possible making comparisons with nurses, midwives and health visitors working outside the FNP.**

The FNP model was introduced in England following extensive use and evaluation in the United States. The FN model sees specially trained professionals working on an intense one-to-one basis with young, first-time mothers from early pregnancy until the child is two years old. Much of the work is focused on sharing information with the young mothers and helping them to change their behaviours by using a 'strengths-based' approach. The work requires intense relationship-building, often with clients who have complex, multiple needs.

Our key findings were:

- Most FNs have a health visiting background and are experienced community workers.
- Most love their jobs, to the extent that some could not currently envisage working anywhere else, such was their enthusiasm. Over 80 per cent rated their role in the FNP as 'better' or 'much better' than their previous job.
- Individuals' sense of 'feeling valued and involved' is very high, and it is clear that FNs and Supervisors feel trusted and able to voice their opinions and make suggestions:

*'You feel valued and special. The whole ethos is that how you're treated is how you'll treat your clients. It's a very valuable lesson.'*

- The senior leads we interviewed spoke highly of the Programme and its positive results so far:

*'When you hear young parents talk, when you see them with their babies, that's when you see the power of the Programme.'*

- While FNs spoke openly about the love they had for their jobs, they also talked about the extremely demanding nature of the role and some questioned how long they would be able to cope:

*'It's emotional labour and it is emotionally draining. The emotional impact of this role is like nothing I've ever seen before.'*

- FNs and Supervisors agreed that the clinical supervision model helped them to cope and to perform well, made them feel supported and was an improvement on the approaches to performance management they had experienced in previous roles. A point of particular value was regular access to a psychologist.
- Sickness absence is low amongst the FNP workforce, with most having had no or just one day of sickness absence in the past year. By contrast, the sickness absence rate for all nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in England is around five per cent (around ten days a year).
- There are some reservations about career opportunities within the FNP. In particular, it is hard for FNs to acquire the managerial experience necessary for promotion to a Supervisor post.
- A major expansion to the Programme is planned between now and 2015, meaning that far more FNs will need to be recruited over the next two years.
- FNs are starting to share their learning and techniques more widely with colleagues in health visiting, midwifery and social care.

The report is available to download from [www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs)

## What is involved in a workforce study?

Gaining a deep understanding of your workforce, or of a particular group within the workforce, brings many benefits. You will gain a better understanding of what motivates people, how they feel about their jobs and their organisation, their expectations, and what might cause them to stay or leave. This will help with career management, engagement programmes, workforce planning and retention packages. Typically, a workforce study will involve two or more of the following:

- a survey of the workforce, or a deep analysis of existing survey data
- an engagement diagnostic, via survey data
- analysis of workforce data over time, to spot trends, patterns and possible issues around turnover and retention
- comparisons with national data wherever possible
- focus groups and/or interviews, to gather qualitative data and test out possible actions.

For further information about the FN workforce study and our wider work in this area, please contact Dilys Robinson at [dilys.robinson@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:dilys.robinson@employment-studies.co.uk)

Figure 1: Word cloud: 'working in the FNP is...'





# Building on strengths for engagement and performance

Paul Fairhurst, Principal Consultant

**For a number of years now, we have worked with individuals and teams to identify, develop and deploy their strengths. The research evidence is very clear that where people are able to spend more of their time using their strengths, the individuals and the business perform better.**

We continue to work with organisations in the private and public sectors using Strengthscope, a robust, practical psychometric tool. Strengthscope helps individuals identify their own strengths and then receive 360 degree feedback on how they can use them to be even more effective. But it isn't just about identifying strengths and then using them all the time. One powerful part of the process is flagging the risk of someone's strengths going into overdrive. Using our strengths comes naturally to us and so the temptation is to use them all the time and in every situation (particularly when we are tired or stressed). Yet, if we overuse or inappropriately use a strength it can turn into a weakness; think perhaps of those who are great critical thinkers but who can overanalyse situations leading to the classic paralysis by analysis.

There is often a knowing laugh when we begin to discuss a strength in overdrive with a coaching client as they recognise their tendency to overplay one of their strengths, and feedback from colleagues will usually reinforce this recognition. This recognition and then working out when and how to deploy strengths effectively, can be one of the most useful parts of the coaching conversation. This is particularly relevant as people move from producer to manager roles



or from manager to director; some strengths that have served them well so far may need turning down and others that have been less used may need to come into play more.

Recent work we have done in this area has involved helping individuals in one organisation prepare for a major organisational change that included significantly different sets of jobs requiring new skills. Using a strengths approach, we were able to help people decide for themselves which of the new roles would suit them best, not just in terms of what they were able to do but also that they would enjoy (and hence perform better). We have also worked with management teams in another organisation to help them understand and deploy their individual strengths to best effect in particularly challenging market conditions.

If you are interested in finding out more about our work in this area, contact [paul.fairhurst@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:paul.fairhurst@employment-studies.co.uk)

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## Have you considered the IES HR Network?

Members recently enjoyed the HR Directors' Retreat, which focused on the HR Director as organisational leader. We have also published an exclusive member paper entitled Organisational Values and the Role of HR, which offers a review of current thinking around establishing and embedding organisational values and the part that HR has to play in these processes.

We are now looking forward to the annual provocation, where this year Gareth Jones, renowned academic, author and consultant, will question whether we are creating the best possible workplaces to allow people to flourish and deliver their best performance. Gareth will tap into the many conversations around this question and explore just what organisations need to do to create the conditions for people to do their best work. This will make challenging listening for organisations; like all great questions there are no easy answers, but we are confident that members will see their organisations differently as a result.

To find out more go to:  
[www.employment-studies.co.uk/network/](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/network/)



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