

Opinion

A new approach to skills supply

The writers suggest a new way for research-intensive businesses and organisations to manage the skills issue – cross-sector job rotation.

Concern about skills supply is tangible in Sweden. Our appeal describes a path to ensuring future skills supply in individual organisations as well as entire sectors by means including utilising the experience and social commitment of older workers – “the elders” – coupled with young people’s needs for support and development. This requires leadership that promotes development and provides scope for innovation, reflection and workplace community.

Today’s society is characterised by major changes in every sector: new innovation systems, service production, administration, etc. For many, sharper focus on the customer is imposing demands for new attitudes, values and methods. In relation to the rest of the world, we are experiencing fiercer international competition, new perspectives on development, innovation and research, greater transparency in research and development (R&D), (international) collaboration agreements, partnerships and outsourcing. The dismantling of rigid, sealed and large R&D units still requires the skills to be available, but perhaps in a different form and in another way.

To not only develop but also retain skills has become a key strategic objective for many organisations in order to equip them to take on the future and deal with demands for change. They are increasingly working with skills supply in a structured manner, including analysis and identification of skills gaps within the organisation, but they sometimes lack methods for solving the problems.

“Attractiveness” as an employer has become an increasingly important strategic objective, especially in the light of the free flows of information and knowledge in our digital society. The trait of “flexibility” is prized in working life, but this also entails great challenges for organisations to offer the learning and the environment that facilitate individual development that today’s talents value so highly in an “attractive employer.”

All organisations with long-term ambitions also need skills with experience of the whole, of the various component processes, and with a

background in and experience of past development. In many places, increasing numbers have come to understand the contributions of the elders to the organisation's and the company's fundamental values, improvement of working methods and support to younger colleagues. Concepts like role models and coaching are considered increasingly important to creating and maintaining the learning environment that is so crucial to skills supply (brand, attract, recruit, retain, etc.).

The solution model we would like to present based on the problems described related to future skills supply consists of cross-sector job rotation. The rotation occurs between different types of organisations within a business area, a value chain, or where different sectors interact. It is combined with leadership that facilitates development and utilisation of the experience of the elders in a coaching mentor role, and constitutes the basis of the local hosting required to generate trust and sustainable exchange.

According to this model, recent graduates or others are given the opportunity to work in various organisations within, for example: the value system for life science and health (between innovation, regulatory requirements, communication and use), or within the value chain planning and building future housing for the elders (social planning, architecture, building, technical equipment, IT solutions, etc.). The model is neutral and welcomes other skills-building agents.

We are convinced that the model described, with its structured utilisation of the skills and experience of dedicated elders, will contribute to the attractiveness of organisations and sectors as employers and to their needs for local skills reinforcement in areas that require better ability to see the big picture than we now see within parts of various organisations, including in R&D companies.

Successful organisations invest resources in innovation. In our appeal, we aim to show that more organisations can do this together by engaging the elders and putting more energy into the potential of the new.

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