Flexible Career Planning for Police Staff – Combining Career Anchors and Competences

CA STEELE, J FRANCIS-SMYTHE, University College Worcester

Objective:

As a result of Police reform the number of roles being civilianised within the police force is increasing. The number of Police staff rose from 53,011 in 1999 to 54,588 in 2001, [, 2004 #16] called for a move towards a 50/50 split between numbers of police officer and police staff so this increase in numbers is a trend that is expected to continue. Currently Police Officers have a relatively clear career path available to them, however nothing similar exists for Police Staff. The first objective of this research is therefore, to attempt to redress the balance and provide a clear career path for Police Staff.

Secondly as described below the literature on careers has moved towards a broader approach to their definition. Some researchers suggest that individuals should be expected to manage their own careers, leaving the organisations role in this process almost redundant. This approach can cause problems of decreased organisational commitment and create a culture where employees are focused on their own needs sometimes at the expense of the organisations. This research aims to implement a flexible career planning system within and managed by an organisation that bases career planning around the individual's values about work.

Design:

Police staff roles are extremely varied across business functions and levels of seniority. They can also be split into operational (e.g. Forensic Investigators, Communications Operators) and non-operational roles (e.g. Human Resources Manager, Finance Officer). This makes career planning a complicated activity, these employees are likely to have a large variety of different reasons for deciding to work with the Police, some may have an interest in becoming a Police Officer, others will have joined simply because they were looking for an opportunity to progress in their profession, regardless of the organisation base and a job within the Police was advertised at the right time. So it can be seen that a "one size fits all" approach to career planning was not going to be appropriate. In the literature on careers a lot has been written about making the definitions of careers more flexible to include the working patterns of more people. Traditionally careers have been viewed as hierarchical progression through an organisation, Van Maanen & Barley have suggested that this approach in effect denies more that 80% of the workforce in the USA the possibility of having a career! [Barley, 1989 #87]. [Hall, 1998 #134] describe the Protean career, this is described as a lifelong series of experiences and identity changes, career success is largely psychological and is defined by the individual. This approach opens up the concept of careers to almost everyone as it also takes into account non-work activities, for example parenting, or full time study. Taking this information into account this research aims to provide a method for applying a more flexible approach to career planning for Police Staff.

It was decided to use Scheins [Schein, 1978 #55] career anchor model as a basis for this work. The 8 career anchors defined by Schein allow for broader lifestyle factors to be considered in career decisions. The 8 anchors are General Management, Technical/Functional Expertise, Autonomy, Creativity, Lifestyle, Pure Challenge, Sense of Service, and Security. The model takes into account people's need for security, be it financial or geographical and also considers that work may not be central to everyone as they may have other

considerations, for example caring for elderly relatives. The end goal is to design a career discussion that would take place alongside performance appraisal and be facilitated by each individuals line manager. Before the meeting individuals would complete the career anchor inventory and a profile would be generated outlining their scores on all 8 anchors to provide a basis for the discussion. The career anchor inventory was adapted slightly to make it more suitable for use in the UK and to fit in with the language used within the Police environment. The first phase of this work was to use an expert panel for one Police Force to match each of the eight career anchors to a selection of Police Staff roles. The aim of this was to see if certain roles were more suited to certain anchors, and to provide a matrix to help with career planning activities. Secondly a database was designed to provide a list of suitable roles for individuals depending on their career anchors. Thirdly a normative study was carried out to produce a norm table for career anchors, which will enable interpretation of individuals scores to be more meaningful. Lastly a structured discussion was designed which culminates in a career plan and will take place alongside the individual's performance appraisal. The final; stage of this research will be an evaluation process to gather data on job satisfaction, career salience, person-job fit and attitude towards performance appraisal to see if the intervention has had an impact. This evaluation will utilise both quantitative and qualitative data and the research is expected to be completed by Spring 2007.

Methods:

This research is being carried out with one UK Police Force. All participants are Police Staff based there, three departments are being used these are Operations, Criminal Justice Support, Crime and Divisional Administration. There are 126 police staff roles being used in this study and 300 police staff will participate. These participants will be split into two groups; one group will go through the above-described competency and anchors based career discussion and have a follow up in six months time. The second group will be used as a control group and will be used to gather data on job satisfaction, career salience and attitude to performance appraisal. This group will undergo the normal appraisal procedure currently in place in the Police Force, this is also based on the ICF but there is very limited room to discuss career planning in this discussion. The normative study uses a general population of 500 UK employees.

Results:

This study is a work in progress, to date the expert panel has completed the matching process of the eight anchors onto the 126 Police staff roles being used. This has revealed as expected that certain career anchors are more suited to certain jobs, and that there are some jobs where people with certain career anchors would probably not be suited. It was decided by the panel that all 126 roles were suited to the Security and Lifestyle Anchor, therefore these were labelled as organisation anchors. This is because being a public sector employer job security is high, and they have a high commitment to flexible working patters and part time opportunities for their employees depending on their needs. Of the 126 roles, 45 were suited to Autonomy, 21 to creativity, 74 to functional expertise, 49 to general management, 60 to sense of service and 51 to Pure Challenge.

By the date of the conference the normative data will be available and managers involved in the appraisal study will have been trained in facilitating the new discussion and the first meetings will be underway. The first batch of data will be available on career salience so it will be possible to look for links between career salience and the different career anchors individuals have. It is predicted that the higher an individuals career salience the higher their scores will be on their favoured career anchors. This is because individuals with high career salience are more likely to be certain about what is important to them at work. The career anchor profiles will have been

compiled for all participants so it will be possible to look to see if the spread of anchors has changed as Schein [Schein, 1996 #19] predicted they would. Lastly the person-job fit and job satisfaction data will be available so it will be possible to see if those in jobs congruent to their career anchors perceive a better fit and are more satisfied in their job.