

OUTPLACEMENT WITHIN THE PROJECT

Outplacement projects are attractive as they secure full staff utilization and allow for investments to be made to enhance methodologies and tools. On a more abstract level they increase the importance of outplacement as a personnel policy and improve the visibility of the consulting firm in the outplacement market.

However, it makes a noticeable difference to the consulting firm whether they counsel, for example, 50 clients on a project or 50 individual clients. And it is not enough to offer volume discounts as usually demanded by large organisations. Really, projects should be remunerated better than individual outplacements given their complexity, the demands they make on the consulting firm and the fact that additional project management cost tend to eat up possible cost savings derived from synergies.

Individual outplacement programmes seem to give way to a new format: Large-scale outplacement projects is a trend which can be observed in many countries. Constant global change requires organisations to adapt to and embrace new developments to secure their sustainability. Cycles of change are becoming ever shorter and occur thus more frequently - a phenomenon hardly any organisation can elude.

To tackle today's challenges organisations explore many avenues. HR is one important "road" to help navigate change, i.e. impact costs, retain and upgrade knowledge, build cutting edge know-how.

When faced with laying off a large number of employees organisations increasingly define projects to cope with the task. Treating outplacement as any other project poses new challenges to consulting firms and affects the entire process from acquisition to implementation.

Large projects invariably involve a large number of stakeholders and decision-makers, all of whom want the project to reflect and address their particular agenda and goals. New protagonists when compared with individual outplacements are, for example, procurement departments who are increasingly involved and look for ever more "value for money" rather than content and service quality. Their ultimate goal in mind procurement departments press for all kinds of rebates and discounts. In the end, consulting firms often have to adjust their counselling programmes, i.e. offer limited programmes – limited in scope and counselling time.

Another strong stakeholder is the work council – in many organisations they have the power to make or break a project. The constellation of having many stakeholders often adds a political dimension to the project the consulting firm needs to handle with utmost care. After all it is the consulting firm's task not to lose sight of what matters most: the people facing termination.

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The May ACF Europe Newsletter will feature an article by Bev White (Managing Director HR Consulting at Penna Plc, London)



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In order to ensure the smooth delivery of results, large-scale projects require aligned processes that mirror the requirements of the project adequately. Sometimes it is even not enough to align processes, and new processes need to be mapped out and established on both sides - within the organisation AND the consulting firm. Vigilant project management and detailed reporting to comply with the requirements of the organisation's various stakeholders are essential. Approximately 20 percent of the project volume is actually spent on project management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. This fact is often overlooked by consulting firms, but needs to be addressed during negotiations if project management is not to become a hidden cost driver.

Other challenges concern service delivery and include, for example, maintaining a high level of service quality for heterogeneous target groups whose members may exchange information and compare experiences. Every employee expects the same quality, yet tailored to his very individual needs. Delivering the same quality and results as on individual counselling programmes poses a formidable challenge, especially when resources are limited due to the procurement departments' intervention. Additional supervision and guidance is needed to manage the large number of counsellors needed to work on such a project.

Supplementary and new services are in demand and have to be included in the service portfolio, one example being job search.

A challenge of a very different kind is – as trivial as it may sound – making appointments. Given the significant number of appointments, making appointments can prove a bottleneck as long-term planning needs to fit with the individual counselling process. Infrastructure and sufficient manpower is key.

Large-scale projects are often lighthouse projects and hence at the focus of the media's attention – a mixed blessing. If you succeed your business will most certainly benefit from the positive media coverage but if you fail your reputation may be seriously damaged.

Outplacement projects are very different from individual counselling programmes. Only experienced consulting firms with sufficient resources and flexibility to accommodate changes in the course of the project will be able to succeed. Large-scale projects are definitely not for the faint-hearted.

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Board Member ACF Europe



IMPORTANT DATES

21 MAY 2013

ACF EUROPE WEBINAR

Next month, on 21 May at 1:30 CET, ACF Europe will host a webinar titled:

'THE ROLL OF PROCUREMENT IN THE SELECTION OF A CAREER TRANSITION PROVIDER'

During week 18 ACF Europe members will receive more information.

15 + 16 MAY 2014

ACF EUROPE CONFERENCE

In 2014, we will organise an ACF Europe conference in Paris from Thursday night 15 May to Friday afternoon 16 May.

Please put these dates in your diary. As soon as we have more details we will inform our members.

Please let us know if you have any topics you would like to discuss during the conference.



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