

Global viewpoint

The trend of outplacement moving from a service reserved for executives to being offered to employees at all levels of a company is not UK specific, it is a worldwide occurrence. CareerNet International (CNI) is a network of outplacement firms across Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Australasia. CNI members from across the globe generally noted that the provision of outplacement has moved from a service reserved for a select few to support employees at all levels of an organisation.

Tetsu Ozawa of Challenger, Gray & Christmas K.K in Japan says the provision of outplacement is "required at all levels by employers" and that "employer reputation is an increasingly significant corporate driver for the provision of outplacement" in Japan. Geoff Officer, Managing Director at The Donington Group in Australia says that "70% of organisations use outplacement services to provide career support for employees at most levels of the organisation" in Australia and New Zealand and that "the 'good employer' sees outplacement as part of their normal HR support for departing employees".

The growing acknowledgement by global employers of the positive impact that outplacement provision at all levels has on employer reputation are also cited by Cigdem Koseoglu of OneWorld Consulting in Turkey, and Jens Daa Hankert, Director at AS3 Companies' operating in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

Jacques Bussy, Director at OasYs in French-speaking Switzerland adds that almost all larger employers "provide access to career transition support at all levels" despite there being no legal requirement to provide such support to redundant staff. At the same time, according to Rolf Erny at trans_m AG in German-speaking Switzerland, there is a growing trend amongst Swiss businesses to offer outplacement more to middle/lupper management with tailored personalised coaching for top management.

Clayton Glen, Chief Executive at HDA and Director of CareerNet, sums up the responses of his peers within the outplacement network by saying: "global trends point towards a professional outplacement sector increasingly being required by organisations to provide internationally scalable and competitive career transition solutions, delivered by local experts, which enhance the employer brand and improve 'survivor' engagement."

Who qualifies for outplacement?

Whilst outplacement services are very much a facet of the modern business world, the industry has its roots firmly in the armed forces. Immediately after the Second World War, the American Army introduced a counselling service to reintegrate servicemen into the economy. This service was designed and delivered by the industry pioneer Dr Bernard Haldane, and was later developed and adopted by organisations in the commercial world seeking to support individuals that were at risk of losing their jobs.

Historically, outplacement support was reserved solely for those at the upper echelons of an organisational tree. However, as the wider business community evolved and ideas of HR best practice and corporate social responsibility became more prevalent, the qualification criteria for the service changed drastically. Stuart Lindenfield is the Head of Transition Services at Reed Consulting. "We spend an increased proportion of our time supporting

blue collar, semi-skilled manual operatives with outplacement support," he says, "which not that many years ago organisations would not have seen the point of. However, it's now deemed important to invest some money in those people that businesses are sadly having to lose to help them move on in their careers."

Studies consistently show that being made redundant is one of the most stressful experiences an individual can face – only less the death of a loved one and divorce. As such, the emotional impact on individuals receiving this news should not be underestimated. As Isabel Chadwick, Managing Director at management consultants CMC, comments: "What you often find is that when people are made redundant it feels like a personal attack. So everyone who has been displaced from an organisation experiences a degree of anxiety and has some hurdles to overcome before they can get their careers back on track. What we're seeing increasingly at the moment is that good organisations understand that it's not

appropriate to leave their people feeling their way in the dark through this experience."

The Oscar-nominated movie *Up In The Air* illustrates the significant emotional effect losing one's job can have on an individual. It charts the story of 'corporate downsizing expert,' Ryan Bingham, as he is outsourced by companies across America to deliver the news to employees that they've been made redundant. The movie shied away from using professional actors for these scenes and instead opted for individuals that had recently lost their jobs. During these exchanged people are portrayed as angry, emotional and at a low point in their self-esteem. Bingham consoles and inspires these employees earmarked for redundancy with the line: "Anybody who ever built an empire, or changed the world, sat where you are now. And it's because they sat there that they were able to do it."

Besides offering emotional support, outplacement services provide individuals with the tools and resources needed to make the

right decision about what the next step in their career will be. "The redundancy process is an emotional time for anyone and an outplacement service is certainly there to help the individual deal with those feelings" says Nick Townend, a Principal Consultant at Right Management. "There's no doubt that one of the best parts of my job is when I see people moving from the tough place of losing their job, to a situation where they are looking forward and can see their redundancy situation as a personal and professional opportunity."

"Once in this mindset outplacement support is all about professional advice and practical support. We begin with guided self-assessment to help each person understand their skills, interests, values and personal circumstances so they can sensibly identify career options. After this initial stage various tools and techniques will be tailored to the individual's specific

support requirements to help them start to move on. People who are considering starting their own business will need very different tools to those who are thinking about how to update their CV for a new role or access that hidden job market through networking."

The support offered by outplacement providers is tailored to individual's needs on a case-by-case basis to help them achieve their desired career outcomes. Despite this, some individuals set to receive career transition support

93% of executives believe that career transition services bring value to employees and organisations, according to Insala's Outplacement Report 2010

do not always recognize the unique value of the service. Phillip Roark is CEO at talent management software provider Insala. As he explains, "research shows that some individuals who experienced outplacement once in their career may not recognise they should take part in the service again when given the choice. An example is someone who went through



outplacement in their mid-thirties and then, maybe ten or even 15 years later are facing redundancy again. Market conditions, individual circumstances and what outplacement providers offer change, and outplacement services are relevant at each stage of life.”

In addition to the benefits for an individual, an organisation can build its reputation as an employer of choice amongst both potential and existing members of staff by offering such services. Rosemary Smart, Delivery Operations Director at Penna, comments: “I think both organisations and employees understand that we’re working in a dynamic world now and that there is no such thing as a job for life anymore - everybody can be effected by downsizing at any level. By offering outplacement to employees at all levels of an organisation it

strengthens an organisation’s brand reputation - if a worker sees that their employer treats people that are exiting with dignity and with support then it sends the right message to remaining members of staff and has a positive impact on retention amongst survivors.”

The shift in the selection criteria for outplacement support has benefits both to the individual and to the organisation. Not only does the service aid employees during one of the most difficult periods of their life, but in the post-Enron business world the value of ethics cannot be underestimated. Organisations that offer such services to staff earmarked for redundancy will be seen to have a strong sense

82% of HR professionals state their biggest concern when reducing headcount is maintaining business performance, according to research from CMC

of corporate social responsibility, which not only influences the opinions of departing and remaining employees but also has an impact on individuals in the wider community. Businesses that take care of their staff will inadvertently strengthen their employer brand, which not only has a positive effect on the retention of existing staff but also has an impact on the future attraction of talent to their organisation.