

Recruiting and Retaining Talent within the Global Waste Management and Decommissioning Industry–17192

Callum Thomas, Thomas Thor

ABSTRACT

Every organisation or project can be defined as the people within it. The difference between having the right people with a culture of loyalty and the wrong people with a culture of high staff turnover is huge. Therefore, the way that the global waste management and decommissioning industry approaches recruitment and retention is a critical success factor.

My colleagues and I have been fortunate enough to support organisations in the nuclear industry across more than 30 countries in recruiting and retaining talented professionals with rare skills. This experience has given us a unique first hand insight, and answers for questions including the following:

- What attracts graduates and experienced professionals to choose a career in the nuclear industry: in waste management, in operations or in new build?
- How can we leverage this knowledge to attract more talented individuals to work in the nuclear industry, and in waste management and decommissioning in particular?
- How can organisations access the existing global talent pool within waste management and decommissioning? (including case studies of best practice in global recruiting)
- What innovative methods are organisations using to successfully find talent? (methods such as strategic secondments, partnerships and knowledge transfer initiatives)
- Why do people typically leave an organization or project in the waste management and decommissioning industry?
- What examples of best practice and lessons learned exist that can help us understand and increase staff retention in the waste management and decommissioning industry?

This paper will answer the questions above and provide recent and relevant examples to substantiate key observations. The objectives of the presentation are:

- To give the audience a summary of best practice and lessons learned related to recruitment and retention in the global waste management and decommissioning industry, and also in the wider nuclear industry
- To show the benefits of taking a global view when looking for talent and

explaining how to access the global talent pool

- To provide an insight in to what motivates talented people to join the industry and conversely what demotivates them and causes them to leave
- To provide information about how organisations in the waste management and decommissioning industry can play to their strengths and better compete with other industries that are recruiting for the same talent
- To provide useful and practical actions that will add value to the audience and their organisations.

Key Observations and Conclusions (substantiated with case studies and evidence in the full paper/presentation)

- Figures from Europe (European Commission) and the US (NEI) about current and future predicted numbers of qualified people required to support the nuclear industry. In the next 2 decades it is clear that demand outstrips supply.
- Effective recruitment means investing in internal recruitment capability, understanding where your target audience are, understanding what they want, designing tailored recruitment campaigns and creating strategic partnerships for secondments.
- Waste management and decommissioning organisations can hire talented people from other sectors, but need to be prepared to compete for this talent. Case studies of how to compete successfully.
- There is a branding challenge when attracting talent to the waste management and decommissioning industry, but this can be overcome by promoting facts such as the value of the industry to the environment, the long-term career opportunity and the global nature of the industry.
- Retention is affected more by the manager/employee relationship than by the organizational culture, and developing line managers to understand and own retention is the key.

INTRODUCTION

Every organization or project can be defined as the people within it, and in most organizations people represent over 50% of total annual spend (as can be evidenced by looking at financial statements of nuclear sites and analyzing labor costs). The difference between having the right people with a culture of loyalty and the wrong people with a culture of high staff turnover is huge. Therefore, the way that the global waste management and decommissioning industry approaches recruitment and retention is a critical success factor.

Data from the European Human Resource Observatory for Nuclear (part of the European Commission) shows that by between 2012 and 2020 over 50% of the current nuclear professionals in Europe will pass retirement age (http://ehron.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/ehron/files/documents/public/ehron_putting_into_perspective_report_2012_05_25_0.pdf), and that new people coming in to the industry will not replace those leaving. The result in 2020 is an expected reduction of 17,000 nuclear professionals in Europe from 2012 numbers (a drop of 21%), and this assumes no growth in overall demand for nuclear professionals which is widely expected (http://ehron.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/ehron/files/documents/public/ehron_putting_into_perspective_report_2012_05_25_0.pdf). Data from the NEI (from an interview with Elizabeth McAndrew in 2014) shows that in recent years the numbers of nuclear professionals in the US industry has been stable, with around 5000 new people joining a year replacing roughly the same amount of retirees and leavers. However, the average length of experience of nuclear professionals in both the US and Europe is falling due to the big gap in recruitment and investment between 1986 and 2006. Both regions have challenges replacing the retirees with suitably experienced staff.

The limited human resource data available in Europe and North America is general data for the whole nuclear industry and does not show the waste and decommissioning workforce picture specifically. The World Nuclear Association's nuclear power plant data (see WNA website) clearly shows that the waste and decommissioning industry is growing rapidly as plants reach the end of their lives and finding solutions for waste management becomes more important in many countries.

This paper aims to provide information substantiated with pragmatic real world examples that can help organizations to recruit and retain the people needed to deliver on the global waste management and decommissioning objectives in the coming decades.

BACKGROUND

The contents of this paper have been gathered through the experiences and knowledge of the 40 recruiters within Thomas Thor Associates that are dedicated specifically to the nuclear industry and collectively support the nuclear industry across

more than 30 countries. Insights gained include the reasons why people join and why they leave the waste management or decommissioning industry, what the perception of the waste management and decommissioning industry is amongst nuclear professionals and amongst those in other industries, and which employers in the waste management and decommissioning industry outperform their peers when it comes to attracting and retaining talent. This paper aims to use information that we have gathered over many years working within the industry to help organizations optimize their approaches to recruitment and retention.

METHODS

The following sections draw examples of best practice in attracting, recruiting and retaining a high quality workforce in the nuclear industry. The nature of our work means that client confidentiality is important and therefore specific names of organizations are not mentioned.

Attracting the right people

All organizations start recruiting with a pretty clear idea about who they are looking for, but few start recruiting with a clear idea of exactly where to find the right people, what the target candidates really want or what kind of competition they are facing to recruit those target candidates. It is extremely difficult to have perfect information in these areas, but it is realistic to gather enough information to increase the success rates of recruiting considerably. The most successful organizations in the nuclear industry are doing this, and the steps can be summarized as:

Step 1 – Identify the target candidate pool(s) – who are they and where are they?

Step 2 – Which other organizations and industries are competing for the same people?

Step 3 – Define what your organization or industry can offer that is unique or more attractive than others competing for the same people

Step 4 – Effective communication strategy to target candidates

A relevant and recent case study of 'Step 1' can be drawn from a large European nuclear utility. They have a specific objective to increase the level of diversity, in terms of sex and ethnicity, in their annual graduate intake. They commissioned a research project that identified all relevant faculties (engineering, sciences, etc) and then systematically approached each university to gather information regarding diversity in each relevant faculty. The results gave them a league table of over 300 faculties based on levels of diversity. The next step was to engage with selected universities and students through presentations and workshops at universities to understand what they were looking for in their careers after university. This initiative is still underway now, and it shows how some fairly simple research can inform the recruiting process and help direct resources when recruiting.

Similar approaches are being taken by organizations looking for target candidates with specific skills or experience that are transferable from other industries to

nuclear, so the approach is not confined to graduate recruitment only.

An example specific to waste management and decommissioning can also be found in Europe. A lot of decommissioning work has taken place in Eastern Europe (eg. Lithuania and Ukraine). Intelligent companies in Europe that are preparing for decommissioning in Germany, Switzerland and the UK are aiming to attract decommissioning experts from Eastern Europe as some of those projects come to a close. This is one of many examples where taking an international view of the target candidate pool provides value.

Another example can be drawn from a nuclear new build project. A workshop held by their leadership team aimed to identify where they might find the people they need to ensure successful delivery of the project. One of the main outcomes of this workshop was the realization that in the area of project control, a critical success factor for the new build project, nuclear experience was secondary to mega project experience. This crucial distinction allowed them to identify 50 mega projects outside of nuclear that had been completed in the last 10 years, and a specific candidate pool to recruit from. They then spent time thinking about what their project had to offer that would attract the best people. A short but powerful list of unique selling points was created, including the sheer size of the project in terms of scope and financial value, the longevity of the opportunity and the cutting edge technology and tools that they had. The recruitment team therefore started their work with a very clear idea of who they were looking for, where to find those people and how to attract them.

The Recruiting process

Different methods for different roles – There is a world of difference between recruiting people with skills and experience that are abundant and recruiting people with very rare skills and experience. For this reason, it makes sense to make a judgement on how hard a role may be to fill before starting the recruitment process. This is quite easily done by looking back at past experience or speaking with peers in the industry who have hired for similar roles. The level of cooperation and sharing in the nuclear industry makes this especially easy to do.

Several examples of best practice can be found within large waste management and decommissioning projects, where a 2-3 year resource plan is maintained and the leaders of the project work closely with the recruitment team to categorize each type of role based on how hard it is likely to be to recruit for. Part of the work that Thomas Thor Associates does is to join such meetings and give professional advice on which roles may be hard to fill and what the likely recruitment time scales will be.

The result is that easier-to-fill roles are managed completely by the recruitment team and candidates are sourced through standard and cost effective channels such as advertising. For harder to fill roles, the process starts early enough to allow for the extended recruiting time scales and line managers are far more involved in the process. Line manager involvement includes ensuring that the job descriptions are detailed and attractive to potential candidates, helping identify where possible

candidates may be found and making themselves available for phone conversations with potential candidates. It is unrealistic that line managers have time to take part in the process for every role, but this level of investment for roles that are important to the success of the project is more than justified.

Take an international perspective – The nuclear industry is a global one, and the work that needs to be done in waste management and decommissioning has a lot of similarities from one country to another. There are of course there are some country specific aspects, such as the regulatory environment, some site specific characteristics and potential security clearance requirements. The waste and decommissioning industry is actually the part of nuclear most suited to international movement of workforce, more so than new build and operations which tend to be more technology specific.

An example of best practice has its origins in Finland. Having spent many years preparing to build the Onkalo spent nuclear fuel repository, one of the trickiest aspects was public acceptance. Many lessons were learned during the project about public engagement and ultimately the project only went ahead, after many delays, due to public support. The people involved in public engagement in Finland, who learned so many valuable lessons along the way, were unlikely to use this knowledge for a similar project again in Finland. Another country with plans to build a waste repository saw this as a recruitment opportunity and aimed to recruit some of those involved to help with their public engagement strategy. There are many examples like this, where taking an international view on recruiting means reducing risk on first of a kind projects (the barakah plant in the UAE is a good example).

The similarity between many waste and decommissioning projects across different countries means that any new project starting is likely to coincide with a similar project finishing somewhere else in the world. Understanding the locations of experienced people are that have relevant and recent experience can add huge intelligence to recruiting efforts and even hiring a few of these experts to act as mentors to locally recruited teams can add huge value and reduce risk in projects.

Staff Retention

There are many factors that influence staff retention, but this paper will focus on the one which happens to be the most common reason cited by people looking to leave their current employer (according to consultants at Thomas Thor Associates).

Very often people do not leave a company, they leave their manager – In many cases the breakdown of the relationship between an employee and their manager is a primary reason for the employee moving on (according to consultants at Thomas Thor Associates). Fortunately, we can draw from best practice across the industry to learn how some organizations are successfully addressing this.

- Involving line managers in the recruitment process early on, at the point of writing the job spec and identifying desired attributes as well as hard skills,

means that the recruitment process is more likely to deliver multiple suitable candidates for interview. This in turn means that line managers can choose the best candidate from a strong field rather than the best of a weak field.

- Greater line manager involvement in the recruitment process means greater investment in the decision and commitment to making the relationship work.
- Supporting line managers in techniques and practices for team building, feedback and communication. Many organizations involve someone from HR to facilitate such team activities, although ownership ultimately rests with the line manager. Examples where it does not work so well often exist where employee engagement, feedback and development is outsourced to other departments such as HR by line managers.

DISCUSSION

Why a career in Waste management and Decommissioning is attractive?

The most critical part of building a competent global workforce in waste management and decommissioning is undoubtedly in attracting the right people to join the industry. The best recruitment and retention practices in the world are futile if not enough people, or the wrong people, are attracted to join the industry in the first place. It is therefore worthwhile spending some time discussing why exactly people should be attracted to work in the waste management and decommissioning industry. A few ideas include:

- Cleaning up our planet is something that appeals to the sense of purpose of many at the current time. How many of these people see waste management and decommissioning as a contribution to this goal? There is definitely a discussion to be had about the branding of the industry, because aligning more towards the goal of a clean and healthy planet may act as a huge recruitment magnet.
- Many people are motivated by having an international career, and the waste management and decommissioning industry is truly global. This message would be very powerful as a tool to attract high quality STEM graduates in particular.
- Career security is scarce these days, and the waste and decommissioning industry has a global pipeline of 50-100 years of work. For anyone that is interested in career security and longevity, waste and decommissioning is looking like a very attractive option.
- Cutting edge technology is being developed and deployed in waste and decommissioning all the time. Many see the industry as the end of the line, the last stage in the lifecycle, and do not realize that cutting edge technology in robotics, remote handling and materials analysis is being pioneered.

How this message can be communicated to the target audience

Identifying what is attractive about a career in waste management and decommissioning is easier than developing a plan to communicate the message to the target audience. The answers lie in segmenting the target audience and then developing a plan for each. Some can be done at an organization level, such as partnering with universities or building relationships with target candidate pools in countries that have a surplus of the required skills. Others are better handled at a collective industry level, such as branding the industry as contributing to a cleaner planet. Whether at an organization or an industry level, the amount of effort aimed at these activities now will have a direct effect on the quantity and quality of the workforce in waste and decommissioning in the coming decades.

CONCLUSIONS

- Figures from Europe (European Commission) and the US (NEI) about current and future predicted numbers of qualified people required to support the nuclear industry. In the next 2 decades it is clear that demand outstrips supply
(http://ehron.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/ehron/files/documents/public/ehron_putting_into_perspective_report_2012_05_25_0.pdf).
- Effective recruitment means investing in internal recruitment capability, understanding where your target audience are, understanding what they want, designing tailored recruitment campaigns and creating strategic partnerships for secondments.
- Waste management and decommissioning organisations can hire talented people from other sectors, but need to be prepared to compete for this talent. Case studies of how to compete successfully.
- There is a branding challenge when attracting talent to the waste management and decommissioning industry, but this can be overcome by promoting facts such as the value of the industry to the environment, the long term career opportunity and the global nature of the industry.
- Retention is affected more by the manager/employee relationship than by the organizational culture, and developing line managers to understand and own retention is the key.

REFERENCES and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EHRON Report from 31 May 2012

http://ehron.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sites/ehron/files/documents/public/ehron_putting_into_perspective_report_2012_05_25_0.pdf

An acknowledgement to the NEI in the US for providing information

An acknowledgement to the staff of Thomas Thor Associates, and selected clients, for providing examples of best practice and lessons learned over the past decade in the nuclear industry.