

Best Talent Management Strategy

Winner

PPD (Part of Thermo Fisher Scientific)

When a business that is reliant on highly skilled workers found itself in the middle of a white-hot talent war, where poaching was rife and the industry standard for attrition had dipped to 26.3% because of the pandemic, pharmaceutical research organisation PPD knew it needed a watertight strategy.

Focus fell on the firm's 5,000 clinical research associates (CRAs) – a career path that you need a life science, medical science, or nursing degree to even consider. These CRAs, who run clinical trials for new drugs, for example, were in high demand.

Many organisations struggle to hold onto talented CRAs. Not only is it common for one of them to move on after finishing a trial, but there are simply not enough experienced CRAs in the market to meet demand.

While convention would have suggested PPD increase its talent pool by hiring more junior staff, it soon became apparent that this would not address underlying issues.

The PPD talent team, therefore, built its strategy on four pillars: attract, grow, develop and retain. It then established a competency framework for CRAs, and set technical standards for the role, laying the groundwork for a data-based approach to managing its talent.

To address employees' growth and development, the team created a new flexible promotions programme instead of the old annual promotion cycle, and provided an online career development tool, which helps CRAs to plan out their development, address skills gaps and track their career journey.

The effect was extraordinary. By opening up the development and promotion journey as a concrete process, with clear milestones, CRAs could now shape their own career paths.



The combination of clear, employee-driven goal-setting and ample, training to achieve these goals, has spurred PPD's cohort of CRAs on to success.

Engagement and retention at the organisation has seen significant improvement. There has been a more than 17% improvement in CRAs' engagement score for professional growth. More than 23% of external junior CRAs hired in 2021 have already been promoted.

The effectiveness of the flexible promotion scheme was proven in a trial that involved two experiment groups and a control group with the old system.

The study found that the groups that had access to the flexible promotion system had

less than half the turnover when compared with the comparison group – their turnover rates were just 8.3% and 6.1%, far below the control of 19.6%.

A reduction in turnover of that scale applied across the clinical research business meant the company saved just under \$1 million, for a programme that cost \$175,000, around £150,000.

Overall, PPD's CRA hiring rate doubled between 2019 and 2021. What's more, 55% of the CRAs hired in 2021 were classed as 'home-grown' while 45% were bought in.

Judges were particularly impressed by the logical, data-first approach to talent management. One said: "[It's] an excellent initiative, with impressive results." **HR**

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