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Nexus Multi-Academy: Using surveys to drive evidence-based improvements in Schools

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Background

Nexus multi academy trust consists of 17 schools, mostly serving pupils with special educational needs. They are a flexible working ambassador who were recruited by the Department for Education and have been providing bespoke flexible working support to schools and trusts.



The organisation has been working closely with several schools nationally to improve their internal processes and practices. Initially, they noticed that many decisions were being made based on false assumptions and feelings of senior leaders, without concrete evidence of what the staff actually wanted or needed. To address this, they decided to implement a comprehensive surveying approach to gather data directly from the staff.

Challenges Faced

One of the main challenges was the reliance on anecdotal evidence and the lack of structured feedback from staff members. Schools were eager to implement new procedures or practices, but there was no clear indication that these changes aligned with the staff's needs or preferences. Additionally, there was a tendency for schools to look to Nexus for direct instructions, which was not their role.

There was a worry that some schools were making blanket flexible working decisions, when the concept can mean different things to different people. Surveying ensured a more personal approach, which hopefully gives more traction to new initiatives and, ultimately, chance of being successful.

Approach



To create a more evidence-based approach, Nexus conducted initial surveys to capture the current opinions and needs of the staff. They also included questions about future intentions, such as potential requests in the next 12 months and the types of support that staff were interested in. This provided a baseline for understanding both the current state and future needs.



They emphasised the importance of using this data to inform decisions, rather than relying solely on senior leadership's perspectives. By repeating the survey later in the program once change had embedded, Nexus aimed to provide schools with tangible data to measure progress and effectiveness.



This use of a more person-centred approach to flexible working, and not a one size fits all approach, meant that employers could adopt initiatives in different ways. This allows differentiation as employers between Multi Academy Trusts in which they can offer unique propositions and initiatives on flexible working.

From an employee's perspective it is hoped that this approach will also increase satisfaction whereby employees feel a sense of equity in accessing flexible working, moving away from a standard policy.

Outcomes

The initial surveys provided valuable insights into the staff's needs and preferences, creating a strong baseline for future improvements. Schools were able to use this data to make more informed decisions, aligning their procedures and practices with the actual needs of their staff.

By repeating the surveys, Nexus were able to track changes in employee satisfaction and collate management information data over time, providing concrete evidence of progress and to identify employee needs for the future around flexible working. This approach not only helped schools measure their success but also empowered staff by ensuring their voices were heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Overall, the surveying approach has proven to be a powerful tool for driving evidence-based improvements in schools, fostering a more collaborative and responsive environment.