

Five questions with Kara Hannigan, Training and Organizational Development Manager, Human Resources Division - kcemployees.com

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Executive Summary

This article is a short Q&A interview with Kara Hannigan, the newly appointed Training and Organizational Development Manager in the Human Resources Division of King County (Washington State). The piece addresses her professional background, her new role, and her motivation for working in learning and development. Hannigan's prior experience spans secondary education, technology training at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and management and leadership development at Starbucks. Her main argument is that employee learning, when prioritized by an organization, creates meaningful impact for both individuals and the broader mission. Key themes include expanding access to centralized learning resources, aligning development offerings with organizational priorities such as 'best-run government,' and the challenge of scaling a small team's impact across a large, multi-departmental organization. The article draws no empirical conclusions and presents no data; it functions as an introductory profile intended for an internal employee audience.

Key Insights

1. Hannigan frames centralized learning and development as a means of ensuring equitable access to existing resources such as KC eLearning and instructor-led classes, rather than solely creating new content.
2. Her career trajectory — from education to philanthropy to corporate to government — reflects a pattern of applying learning and development principles across diverse institutional contexts.
3. She identifies organizational scale and departmental fragmentation as the primary structural challenge for a small L&D team operating within a large county government.

Practical Takeaways

- King County's L&D approach emphasizes connecting employees to existing learning resources and improving communication about access, rather than defaulting to new program creation.
- Cross-sector L&D professionals transitioning into public sector roles may face a learning curve around navigating complex, multi-departmental organizational structures.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a clear and authentic first-person account of an L&D leader's philosophy and priorities. It offers a candid acknowledgment of organizational challenges, including team size and scope constraints. **Limitations:** The piece contains no data, research citations, or measurable outcomes. It is an internal communications profile, not an analytical or research-based article. All claims are anecdotal and self-reported. **Bias:** The format is promotional by nature — designed to introduce a new employee favorably to colleagues — which limits critical perspective. There is no external validation of the programs or approaches described.

Organizational Practice

King County's Human Resources Division operates a centralized Learning and Development function that provides employees with access to eLearning platforms and instructor-led training. The L&D team works to identify high-value development areas aligned with the county's mission and seeks partnerships across departments to reduce barriers to learning access.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader pattern in public sector HR of centralizing learning functions to improve resource equity across large, fragmented workforces. The emphasis on aligning L&D offerings with government mission priorities — rather than generic skill-building — points to an emerging practice of mission-driven performance development in public institutions. The acknowledged tension between small team capacity and large organizational scope is a recurring structural constraint in government L&D that shapes program design and delivery choices.

Validation Status: passed
