

Humanising the Restructuring Process

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Background

All Organisations from time to time need to look at evolving but, change by its very nature causes stress and even witnessing alterations to close colleagues' working and professional lives can trigger a great deal of anxiety for *all* staff within a Department/Unit undergoing a re-structure.

The definition of re-structure is; an organisational change that has effects on the composition and workload of the workforce. In most cases restructuring implies some form of transition or change on the individual level, often a transition to another job, within or outside the organisation.

For the best possible outcome, reorganizations should be undertaken in the most humanistic manner possible. Remaining employees will look to how the Organisation treated 'at risk' employees. Attitude and behaviour towards Management will increase or decrease future trust levels within an effected work group.

Much emphasis, post the announcement of the upcoming process, is directed at those staff deemed 'at risk' and the people whose roles are not directly affected are subsequently overlooked.

This static team of people may have many questions during this transition phase e.g. Who do they report to? Is there an expectation for an increase of workload?

Our group wished to analyse and address how these employees needed to be accommodated by the University's Management Team in order to keep motivation and loyalty strong.

Surviving staff are an instrumental part of building the future of the Organisation and therefore their commitment on all levels is essential.

The period of impending change can be drawn-out over many months during which a strong theme of ensuring that the process is relevant to all employees needs to be conveyed.

Communication and transparency of process is critical. You cannot over-communicate during this time. People will be seeking information, and if it does not come from Management then rumours will take its place.

Change takes time. So University resources should be made fully available to support the efforts being made by the Department/Units Managers on a pastoral level e.g. Chaplaincy support and Occupational Health, through this challenging period.

There is a need to be open to questions and concerns from *all* employees.

Ideas/Solutions

Communication

During a period of restructure communication is vital from the Senior Management to keep employees informed of the progress. Regular effective communication can significantly reduce people's level of anxiety and uncertainty during times of change.

"The greatest difficulties encountered during a process of change are those that arise inside people's heads." (Pendlebury et al 1998)

Communication needs to be about listening not just about informing employees of the progress. This is a way for Senior Management to collect feedback on opinions, feelings and ideas that employees have. Effective communication will also help improve staff willingness to take part and get involved with the change process.

From the recent staff survey results it is clear that communication between management and staff could be improved as 53% feel that this is not effective. There needs to be a wide variety of channels/methods such as team briefings and weekly email newsletters to help keep employees informed on progress and the next steps. The briefing sessions can also be used to collect feedback from employees on how they feel the change is being implemented and how the new structure will work.

The language that is used in the communication needs to be considered so it does not confuse everyone. Different people interpret what is being said in different ways so it needs to be clear what the outcome is to be of each communication. The communication needs to be open and honest so employees feel they have not been misled by management. If this is the case then people will lose trust in the organisation and this will impact on performance and affect the Student Experience.

Support

Support needs to be available for all staff not just those at risk. Employees that are classed as "not at risk" are affected through change as much as those who are not at risk. Pendlebury et al (1998) describes this as *"Any change unsettles them and challenges them to some extent, because it affects individuals directly by impacting their view of the world, their role in the environment and the way their identity is constructed."*

Support Surgery times and appointments with HR and/or managers could be made available for staff who need to talk about the change and how it is affecting them. This would also help employees to understand and embrace the changes as well as seeing the opportunities that may arise from this.

CV and Interview support should be made available to all employees and not just made available to those at risk, once they know they are at risk. Employees might want to improve their career at BU but during a period of change might not be able to as the "at risk" staff may receive more of a chance to change role or move departments.

With all staff supported throughout the change this will help improve morale and reduce resistance towards the change. This would help employees feel part of the organisation and be more adaptable to the change.

Structure/Timeframe

Keeping the employees informed of the structure of the changes taking place will help staff to understand the timescales. A structure will also help employees be able to look at the bigger picture and see how their department will look once all the changes have been completed. This will also give staff information on how the changes should progress.

Staff members who feel that they have not had a chance to put their views forward or do not understand the proposed changes will be less likely to support the changes. They may also lose confidence in the organisation and may be less committed to helping it achieve its goals. Involving others in decisions or explaining why things have been decided will help with staff empowerment.

Timeframes need to be set to for items such as redundancy and interview dates for new positions. This helps employees to gauge when the changes will start to affect their positions and if they are to be made redundant they can make a plan for their own future within BU or to look outside the organisation.

Transition

Staff not directly at risk can be unsure on workload or reporting structure during transition. Staff can feel isolated and not clear on their role or when this will change. There can also be confusion around who is doing which bit of work as staff are not sure when they should hand tasks over to a new team. This can be dealt with through effective communication and support for all teams and staff from management.

Staff not at risk should be able to apply for all the jobs not just the at risk staff. This could result in a better candidate being selected for the role from a wider selection. Staff may not feel that they have had an equal opportunity to apply for a role and further their career within BU so decide to leave and take their skills to another company or business.

Strong leadership is also required during a transition period. Management should communicate effectively with staff and be able to answer questions in forums or on a one-to-one basis. This would help employees to adjust to the new working style and alleviate the fears of employees.

Morale Boost

All staff morale drops not just those at risk as people will be upset about people losing/changing jobs. People are worried about what the change will mean for them and how this will affect their role.

“Major internal transformation rarely happens unless many people assist. Yet employees generally won’t help, or can’t help, if they feel relatively powerless.” Kotter (1996)

By implementing the above stages this will help to improve the morale of staff going through an organisational change. Increasing participation from employees around the change can help give them some input into how BU can work in the future. This can be done through a consultation process which would enable staff to voice their opinions through a variety of mediums such as forums, emails, blogs etc.

References

Kotter, J., 1996. *Leading Change*. USA: Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.

Pendlebury, J., Grouard, B., Meston, F., 1998. *The Ten Keys to Successful Change Management*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Conclusions

For the best possible outcome, reorganizations should be undertaken in the most humanistic manner possible. Remaining employees will look to how the Organisation treated 'at risk' employees. Attitude and behaviour towards Management will increase or decrease future trust levels within an effected work group.

Each member of a Department must be seen in no less than 3 ways; all of which are as important as each other:

1. Department Member
2. Team Member
3. Individual

No two people are alike and so communication can be enabling for one and demoralising for another.

Throughout any restructure, no one person should be made to feel like it is personal - especially those 'at risk'. The damage that it can do could be irrevocable for the person and the team.

Whilst a restructure is determined by the Senior Management of a team or department, its success during and after is down to the entire department - if they are not on board, then the whole process will fail.

With solid ideas, good foundation for what and why this is happening, excellent communication - verbal and non-verbal and openness to listen, to discuss and to inform then a restructure can take place with limited resistance.

So how we achieve this?

- Excellent Communication
 - Newsletters
 - Emails
 - Central point for all information
 - Team meetings
 - Engagement of the individual
 - Access to you
 - Prevent the rumour mill from working overtime
 - Inform who the key individuals are for the restructure
- Timelines
 - Set dates
 - set tasks to be achieved by
 - set a static end date for the restructure
 - set a static end date for the post-restructure work
- Organise
 - gather help - external to the department
 - get help information for group meetings
 - ensure people know where to look for restructure and additional information
- Visibility
 - Make sure staff see you
 - manage day to day decisions during the transition
 - Ensure line managers are visible to all
- Post-restructure
 - be there to lead the transition

- continue communications
 - be visible
 - get people involved to make them feel part of this process - they do have some good ideas
 - just because a restructure has occurred doesn't mean team members aren't still feeling the effects
 - Allow people to apply for new positions, where appropriate. Not just those at risk.
- Colleague Assistance Pack
This is an information pack that can be supplied to all individuals at the start of a restructure during this period of instability.
 - How to contact.....
 - CV Writing Service
 - Graduate Service (BU)
 - Employee Assistance Programme
 - Chaplaincy
 - Counselling Service
 - Union
 - Who to.....
 - contact within HR for assistance
 - contact within the Department/School Management

Any team is as strong as its weakest link - so support them all.

“All great changes are preceded by chaos.” -Deepak Chopra