SMALL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Inspiring Leadership | **Leadership Foundation** for Higher Education

Delivering the difference: A new framework for supporting organisational change

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01. What is this about?

The changing higher education context places competing demands on our leaders and managers. They must be global and local; be a visionary leader and manage the detail; break down boundaries and retain tradition; respect academic freedom and be accountable. Of course, many of these conflicts exist in the world beyond higher education too, it's just that higher education is a little slower than other sectors in catching up. The traditional and outdated higher education notion that the value of staff and organisation development is restricted to the delivery of development events and away days needs to change, and it needs to change quickly if we are to adequately support our leaders and managers in developing the capability to juggle these tensions.

However, the ever increasing pace of these multiple and complex demands on heads of departments and departmental managers results in fewer opportunities to take time out for formal development or to have time to reflect on and implement learning.

In a restructure, the bulk of support provided by the centre often focuses on the restructuring process itself, with policies and procedures in place to guide and inform. Once the restructure has been designed, it has to be implemented. This is often where leadership and organisation development (LOD) practitioners are called in to provide support post-restructure, usually in the form of a request for an away day. Increasingly, due to budget and time restraints, these away days are rarely away nor do they last a day.

This case study is therefore aimed at LOD practitioners within higher education who are called on to provide a team with away day support post-restructure.

The case study

This case study explores a piece of work that supported an academic school in implementing an administrative restructure. The project piloted an organisational development (OD) template created by the internal staff development team that incorporated a well-known OD model: Burke and Litwin's (1992) *A Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change.*

An academic department needed to respond to both internal and external challenges. The external environment was heralding dramatic changes which included changes in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and increasing competition from external (private sector) providers who were offering cheaper and shorter equivalent courses and qualifications, all of which were exacerbated by the outcome of the EU referendum. These challenges were affecting the ability of the department to recruit students, both nationally and internationally, which in turn impacted its financial viability. Historically, the department had a good reputation but, given the external environment, found itself with some catching up to do in terms of how it presented its offer to attract national and international students. There had also been ongoing work looking at how it wanted to rebalance its research strategy. In light of changes to both student recruitment and its research strategy, the support and service offered by professional service staff within the department needed to be reviewed. There had also been rumblings of dissatisfaction for a while within and about the professional service team. Sickness absence levels and the involvement of human resources in staff management decisions had been steadily increasing. As a result, a full review of professional services was undertaken.

The review (which didn't go smoothly) identified a number of findings which did not make easy reading. They included: the staffing resource was misaligned, misused and misunderstood (academic and professional service staff didn't fully understand who did what and why, the service provided by individuals for individuals varied enormously and there was a silo mentality); the management governance and internal communications did not enable effective communication; some processes, systems and approaches to work were outdated, ineffective and inefficient; and personalities dominated over professionalism. Both the internal and external challenges were also compounded by a higher than average turnover of departmental managers (four managers in five years).

Following the outcomes of the review, work was done to identify changes to the structure, functions and processes of professional services so it could support the department in meeting current and future demands. A revised structure was agreed, along with changes to job roles and responsibilities, all of which were supported by a human resources manager and followed the university's restructuring policy and procedures including staff consultations. One outcome of the revised structure was that the majority of professional service jobs changed and approximately 50% of the professional service workforce in the department took the opportunity to either take early retirement or look for alternative employment either within or external to the university. It wasn't until these staff had left and the final few job descriptions had been signed off that the staff development team was called in to support the departmental manager in embedding the structural changes and to create a positive work culture.

The initial request focused on providing an away day and identifying what training and development support might be available for staff. An all too familiar scenario.

Driven by the need to explore how they could increase and improve support to managers and the organisation, the staff development team had recently created a framework or consultancy template. They hoped it might enable departments to get more from the staff development team than simply the design and delivery of away days as a means to implement and influence change at the human level. The template was designed to explore context, guide initial conversations, identify next steps and develop a richer working relationship. ◼

02. What we did

The consultancy template

The consultancy template combined two elements - a framework based on The Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke and Litwin, 1992) to enable focused research, deeper diagnosis and understanding of context, and a set of headings developed from a number of private sector consultancy briefs to help turn the research and diagnosis into agreed actions.

The template (see Appendix 1) takes the contracting manager and the staff development/OD practitioner (hereafter named developer) through five key stages. These stages are: understanding the challenge; the identification of stakeholders; understanding success measures; the Burke and Litwin's (OD) framework to help understand the context; and some ideas of next steps, which we termed 'Our Ideas'.

The template starts by documenting the challenge(s) the department or team is facing, recording the facts and ending with a statement outlining what the manager/leader wants to achieve. Identifying stakeholders and success measures ensures that discussions focus on who has an interest in a successful outcome and what that successful outcome is. Information gathered then helps to inform a communications plan for whatever activities are identified. The OD framework (which is explained more fully below) is then used to collate all the information gathered during the contracting and data collection phase. The final section, Our Ideas, provides an opportunity to write down initial thoughts and ideas as to what the next steps need to be.

The OD framework

The OD framework (section four of the template) is based on *Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change*. Based both on research and practice the model proposes a number of elements required for organisational performance and change, their inter-relationships and how together they affect performance and can enable effective change at both a transactional and transformational level. It was chosen because of its research base and the way in which it helped describe the total environment or system to which any organisational change is subject. It is more complex looking than other OD models (eg Jay Galbraith's STAR model (Galbraith, 2016)) but shows clearly the inter-relationships that exist, for example between management and leadership, organisation culture and local team climate, individual needs and motivations and organisation strategy and vision. Change any element and organisations end up with both intended and unintended consequences. The model's biggest strength is that it highlights the difference between transactional and transformational elements of change. The staff development team hoped that by using a model to describe the many different elements involved in organisation performance and change they would be able to show why there was a need to spend time understanding the context and perhaps explore other options than the design and delivery of an away day as a means of supporting managers to embed change. Another valuable element of the model is that it clearly articulates the role and impact of being a manager and a leader.

How the consultancy template was used

After an initial discussion with the department manager and the deputy faculty director of operations, the template was completed by the developer. Using a template to capture the discussions identified a number of gaps along with their potential impact and implications at each of the levels. At the transformation level there was no strategy linking the professional services support staff to the department's academic strategy or the faculty professional services strategy. There was also the challenge of how to implement the restructure to turn around the silo mentality into a culture of collaboration and shared problem solving.

At the transactional level little was known about how the processes and ways of getting things done would work due to the departure of experienced staff as a result of the restructure. At the individual level there were assumptions about motivation and individual needs and values, but no hard information.

While it became evident to the developer that there were some obvious pieces of work that needed to be done, as part of the discovery process it was important that they were also identified by the departmental manager. The thinking here was that in order to really offer transformational change support, the developer needed to coach and guide the manager rather than tell them what needed to be done. The template enabled this discussion and the manager's self-discovery due to the clear and concise way the information was presented.

One key observation at this point was that while attention had initially focused on putting together a team building event, it was very evident that the 'team' wasn't in place yet.

By using the consultancy template the initial work identified in collaboration with the departmental manager included:

• Developing a professional service staff strategy.

• Designing a local induction process to support the development of the new culture.

• Further data collection focusing on professional service staff, their motivation, needs and values.

It was agreed that as it was the start of the academic year (a peak period of activity), priority would focus on designing a local induction process, which the departmental manager took forward and further data collection for which the developer would take responsibility. The professional services strategy would be tackled at a later date, potentially during an away day.

The developer took forward the next phase of data collection and undertook a number of one to one interviews with professional service staff in the department. The analysis of the interviews led to the discovery of three interesting points. Firstly, the overwhelming response from staff to not have an away day! The second was that many staff had concerns over their ability to do their new job and were able to express this in a confidential setting. The developer was able to point them in the direction of development support that matched their individual needs which they could either access immediately or think about for a future date. Thirdly, by speaking to staff individually and focusing on them and their needs, the majority left the interviews feeling listened to and supported. Anecdotally this led to staff feeling more supported and therefore more engaged despite the uncertainty they experienced.

After the interviews the developer added the information into the OD framework (section four) and discussed the findings with the manager. One joint observation was that it was clear that staff were working really hard on the ground to make sure that needs were being met despite a huge amount of uncertainty. This then led to a conversation with the manager around how they wanted to be viewed as a leader particularly in the area of reward and recognition of professional service staff in the department. Working with and coaching the departmental manager on how they wanted to present themselves as a leader and manager of the department was a unique opportunity to explore their individual skills and abilities and how these might impact (positively and negatively) on the team. The Sheffield Leader and Sheffield Professional behavioural models were used in these discussions as lenses through which the departmental manager could reflect on their leadership and management style and aspirations for the team. Thus, despite being in the middle of an intense period of work, time for personal reflection and development was enabled.

Reflection on progress using the consultancy template continued to identify activities needed at the transactional, transformational and individual levels. There were:

- **Transformational level:** continued coaching with the manager around management and leadership.

- **Transactional level:** development of the senior management team so that the change in culture (and aligned projects/pieces of work) was owned and implemented by more than the departmental manager.

- **Individual level:** a communications plan to show that the work and effort staff were putting in to deliver the service was recognised and the creation of coffee mornings as opportunities to meet others within the team and share ideas/concerns etc.

Discussions around developing the right culture then identified that, while attention had been focused on how the manager could influence professional service staff and their behaviour, other stakeholders also needed to be considered. It was therefore time to engage the academic head of department (HoD) and work with them to explore their role in ensuring successful change.

At a face to face meeting with the HoD the manager used the consultancy template to drive the agenda of the meeting and it proved a useful resource to show both progress to date as well as the rationale for what had been done and why. During this conversation the HoD provided further contextual information particularly around the factors at play in the external environment. The consultancy template also provided a vehicle through which the departmental manager was able to ask for support and endorsement of the activities identified through the diagnosis phase.

Running in parallel with work on engaging the HoD was also the need to engage and develop the professional service management team so that the change was owned as widely as possible.

The restructure hadn't altered the composition of the senior management team, but the role and remit of the teams they represented had increased in scope and expectation. Work therefore needed to be done to identify how to develop and equip the senior management team so they could be real advocates of and proactive in embedding the changed structure and creating the new positive collaborative problem solving culture that was needed. The developer worked with the departmental manager to structure the first senior management team meeting, which the HoD also attended. At this meeting the outputs from the consultancy template were shared and the departmental manager set out how they wanted to develop the professional services strategy.

It wasn't until this point that discussions started to focus on an away day. The content of the discussions focused on how time out could be used to help engage interest in and commitment to a professional services strategy and how a learning and development process could be designed to support staff in achieving the strategy. The away day finally started being planned four months after the original conversation. ◼

03. What impact did this work have?

The consultancy framework provided the developer with a tool to research, develop and deliver a set of activities far beyond a tokenistic away day. It did require a bigger investment of time upfront but it soon became clear that this was hugely beneficial. Rather than organising an away day, the manager directed their energy into designing and supporting a new induction programme and worked with staff to ensure they felt supported through the change at a demanding period of time (the start of the academic year). The framework also provided the developer and the manager with a means of managing and reviewing progress. It enabled clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and, towards the end of the process, the departmental manager and senior administration managers were working together far more to ensure the overall goals of the restructure were delivered. The developer therefore was able to focus on the continued development of the departmental manager's leadership skills, by acting as a coach and sounding board. In turn this meant that development was undertaken in the flow of work itself and any learning was able to be implemented more quickly. By the end of the process the departmental manager was using the developer in an advisory capacity, thus freeing up the central resource to be moved onto other OD projects.

In summary, by using the above template, a request to deliver an away day resulted in the following being achieved:

- A professional services strategy for the department, generated collaboratively and owned by all departmental staff.

- Clear communication around the expected culture and behaviours required of staff, embedded within induction, team meetings and the professional services strategy.

- Senior management team meetings now being future focused, more open and collaborative in nature – reflecting the culture that the restructure was aiming for.

- An away day, held six months after initial contact, which focused on the development of the professional services strategy and engaged and motivated all staff.

- Feedback from academic colleagues at all levels reporting a calmer, more professional can do attitude of professional service staff.

- Regular social activities (which staff attend!)

- Learning and development plans for all staff and a clear and transparent process by which development is provided. The plan is kept as a working document and staff are encouraged to engage with it, updating their development whether planned or unplanned.

- A management/supervisory training programme in place to support effective delegation, communication and collaboration between the different teams.

Therefore, at a departmental and organisational level the support provided was much deeper and impactful.

Further evidence of impact includes sickness absence levels within the department in the subsequent six months being reduced to a lower and more sustainable level, and HR operations needing to have very little involvement in the department since the OD work started.

Impact at the organisational level has been that the departmental manager is now being used by the faculty to support another manager through a very similar restructure process. They are also providing development support to managers in a different faculty through the delivery of learning events around communication during periods of change – the key benefit being that the departmental manager is able to provide that all important insider/expert view.

As well as all the above, the staff development team now has a tried and tested consultancy template which can be used to support the organisation in its OD agenda. ◼

04. Lessons learned

For those developers thinking that they might implement the framework in their institutions the following are some practical lessons learned which might be of use.

- The template and model do not represent a quick fix and may not be suitable in all cases. Time needs to be set aside for both the developer and the commissioning manager to undertake the research and build up the content of the template.

- There needs to be a clear understanding between the manager and developer that, while the process is a structured one, the outputs of it need to evolve. For those who like to tick things off the list, it can be a bit frustrating while the list is being generated!

- Involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process, and communicate with them as frequently as possible – in this instance academic staff could have been involved more and sooner in order to engage them in supporting the staff through the change.

- Speaking to the individuals at the heart of the change is invaluable – they feel recognised and listened to and at the same time can save you a lot of time and energy in pointing out what will and won't work and why in terms of development interventions.

- Focus on communication right from the start – silence is nearly always misinterpreted. ◼

References

Burke, W. and Litwin, G. (1992) 'A causal model of organizational performance and change', *Journal of Management*, 18(3): 523-545.

Bridges, W (2004) *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes 25th anniversary edition* Boston: Da Capo Press.

Galbraith, J. (2016) The Star Model. www.jaygalbraith.com/images/pdfs/StarModel.pdf [accessed 2 November 2017].

Appendix 1:

The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Proposed title

Commissioning department

Facilitator name
Date

Hello...

This document summarises my initial ideas, based on the conversation we had.

This is a starting point, and we can continue to make changes to the proposal as we both see fit.

Once you're happy with this proposal, I will scope out a fuller plan. To help me do this, I may find it useful to talk to some people in your department about what development they need.

Contents

1. ...your challenge
2. ...your audience
3. ... your success measures
4. Understanding your context
5. Our Ideas

...your challenge

Summarise the reason why the department is thinking about development

...your audience

Summarise who the development is aimed at

...your success measures

Summarise how we will know if we have been successful

Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992) A Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change. Journal of Management, 18(3)

External environment	Mission and strategy	Leadership	Organisational culture
Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text
Structure	Management practices	Systems	Work unit climate
Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text
Task and individual skills	Motivation	Individual needs and values	Individual and organisational performance
Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text	Add a little bit of body text

Our ideas

Summarise our proposed solution

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