

Giving Employees the Competence to Manage Through Change

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Sue Sherliker, an Associate of Anne Shaw Consultants, shows how the University of Manchester has helped employees in its administrative function to adopt a positive and proactive approach to managing themselves through a period of significant organisational change

After 100 years of working together, the two institutions of University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) and the Victoria University of Manchester are formally combining to form a single university on 1 October 2004, to be known as The University of Manchester.

Alan Gilbert, President and vice chancellor designate, describes his vision of the new institution as being: "An academic powerhouse in Manchester, whose international recognition and academic performance places it unambiguously among the world's greatest and most influential universities". The vision is inspirational, and the enthusiasm and initiatives for achieving it are much in evidence across the organisation.

The Registrar and Secretary's Department (RSD) will be a critical component in realising this vision. It houses the administrative support resources for the new university, encompassing a wide range of functions including: finance, personnel, estates, academic registry services and residential services, and a wide spectrum of employees, from domestic assistants to highly qualified professionals.

Doug Minhall, Organisation and Development Service Manager at the RSD, was keen to take a proactive approach to supporting people through the change. He recognised that, without full understanding of what the change means for them and without the necessary competence, employees could quickly become fearful of what they perceived to be the unknown. If this was not addressed, it could rapidly undermine effective performance.

Doug was also concerned that, within the RSD, given the diversity of functions, “There was not *one* management culture, but a *myriad* of management cultures and, as a result, a variety of allowable behaviours”. In answer to the question “What does it feel like to be a manager around here?”, the responses could be summarised by one statement: it depends on which department you work. The styles often related to the professional backgrounds of particular employee groups and, on occasions, had been influenced by some previous charismatic manager who had “left their mark” on the organisation.

CONSULTATION

After a period of consultation with some 200 managers and employees within RSD, the majority view emerged that it would be useful to have something that they could all sign up to.

They wanted an agreed statement of management behaviours and attributes that would support the realisation of the President’s vision for the new organisation as well as incorporating the broad range of management styles that would have currency in RSD. Of these, they perceived that there were several behaviours of particular importance for facilitating positive progress through the transition. These behaviours are outlined in the box below.

1. Competencies linked to successful transitions	
The competencies below were seen as fundamental to the creation of a culture in which managers felt able to manage other people through change and in which employees felt able to manage themselves through change.	
Managing others	Self-management
Themes	Themes
Motivating others	Building a credible profile
Influencing others	Challenge and be prepared to be challenged
Managing performance	Visibility
Developing others through coaching	Confidence and self-motivation

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Doug worked together with Anne Shaw Consultants to design several programmes to address the development needs of different employees around these behaviours. The programmes were called:

- Personal Management Effectiveness;
- Getting the Best From People;
- Making a Personal Impact; and
- Women in Administration Management

The programmes were tailored to support the specific needs of groups of employees: senior managers, employees at middle to senior grades, and also, female managers. All programmes shared common overriding objectives, however:

- to optimise performance during and after the transition process
- to encourage and enable participants to take responsibility for managing themselves through the changes
- to facilitate a teamworking culture across RSD

Participants' expectations from the programmes are listed below:

Some of the stated expectations of participants from the programmes

- opportunity to learn from each other
- ability to find time to think
- learn how to manage effectively
- to interact more confidently, more widely and at a higher level
- learn how to maintain motivation and morale
- to bring the psychological viewpoint to managing people
- to build confidence
- to understand what motivates me and what I want from the new organisation
- to gain more responsibility
- to become a better communicator
- clearer objectives around personal development

LEARNING METHODS TO ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP

In order to instil the necessary degree of ownership in participants and to inspire them to take responsibility for managing themselves and others, Anne Shaw Consultants employed a variety of action-orientated learning methods within the programmes, including:

- buddying
- action learning sets
- networking

The 'buddying' approach, whereby employees paired up on courses, proved an effective tool for introducing co-coaching sessions and for supporting each other in the development of action plans for application back in the work environment.

Action learning sets worked well for managers and employees at more senior grades where, working together in small groups, or 'learning sets', they undertook projects of direct relevance to their work, both on the courses and in the RSD workplace.

In similar vein, learning sets were a powerful method for the female managers. They worked together in groups of 4 throughout the modular programme, both during the workshops and on specific projects putting the learning into practice in between modules.

Participants were also encouraged to establish their own networks across RSD and with the academic community in order to improve cross functional effectiveness as well as to build their own profiles. An example of networking in action sprang from the Women in Administration Management programme where one learning set undertook a networking project to explore the criteria for success as a female manager. This involved them in approaching and interviewing a number of successful senior female managers across the organisation. Two direct outcomes from this project were, firstly, immediate support for the programme from senior management, including the then Pro-Vice Chancellor, Katharine Pereira, and secondly, the creation of a network for women in RSD.

Programme themes included:

Leadership, influencing styles, managing energy and job commitment, developing visibility through networking, motivation, emotional intelligence, building confidence, conflict-handling, coaching.

Learning methods included:

Buddying, action learning sets, networking, project-based learning, psychometrics for self-analysis

SELF ANALYSIS AND PSYCHOMETRICS

The programmes also employed methods to allow some self-analysis and exploration of individual motivations and attitudes to change.

Perhaps the most startling finding, from the Motivation Questionnaire (Saville & Holdsworth), was that, in one group of 14 female managers, 11 of them had described the need to feel secure about their job (Ease & Security), as their primary motivator, with only one of them thriving on feeling involved in work (Immersion). This was a bit of a wake-up call to those amongst them who had perhaps been blaming the organisation, and external factors, for their own lack of progress. These findings forced them to confront the implications of their own motivations and to begin to think about what they themselves could do about their progress. They began to take responsibility for their own situation.

PROGRAMME FEEDBACK AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The success of the programmes so far has been measured both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Feedback from participants on the programmes was captured a few days after the events in order to avoid the bland, 'happy' response which so frequently happens with instant feedback when participants are experiencing the immediate motivational effect of a course. Time to reflect can lead to greater objectivity. These are some of the quotes from delegates:

Quotes from participants:

- "the time devoted to buddying was particularly useful"
- "it really built my confidence to tackle tricky people and situations"
- "I feel confident to put the work into practice and get real results with my people"
- "I am in a much stronger position to manage upwards than ever before"
- "it has really assisted me in understanding other peoples' styles of managing and communicating and I am using this knowledge to good effect"
- "challenging – particularly in generating a real sense of ownership for my personal and professional agenda"
- "the most appropriate self-development activity I have ever undertaken"

Many of these comments reflect a sense of progress in terms of employees managing themselves and other people more readily.

It is worth also mentioning examples of some specific outputs:

Manager A needed to implement changes in working methods with a particularly change resistant workgroup. He used the course to be less directive, increase his listening skills and draw ideas from team members with great success in influencing change.

Manager B had one member of her small team who was difficult to manage. She used learning from the course to identify this person's motivational needs and allocate work which related to these.

Manager C came to the course with a self image which was negative and she frequently apologised. Through the course she was able to stop doing this, become more self confident and apply successfully for a more responsible job.

Manager D had a tendency to hold back in meetings and not always express her views assertively. Through practice and support from course members she became more assertive and made some proactive changes to her work commitments.

Manager E used the course to influence her team to make changes and improve customer service to students.

Manager F recognised that he had unduly high needs for control and learnt to delegate more effectively. He also developed self confidence and applied successfully for a more demanding job at a higher grade.

Perhaps the best measure of success, however, is the quantitative data gathered by Doug Minhall. He was examining the new organisation appointments statistics and found that more than 35% of the programmes' delegates had been promoted in the new organisation. He expressed genuine surprise at this figure because the roles of many of them were not affected by the restructuring.

Above all, the programmes enabled a sense of a more unified RSD amongst the delegates, something that should continue through the networking groups established and should prove to be a sound rudder to guide them as the organisation changes.