

Case study: A focus on people during change

This is a case study collected in 2012, as part of a research project by Alana McDonald, to identify and make available leadership experiences from LDC alumni.

The purpose of the case study is to stimulate reflection and discussion on your leadership practice. A case study provides an opportunity to ask yourself 'what would I do in the same situation?'

If you have any comments or feedback, contact toolkits@ldc.govt.nz

I have had a number of significant experiences with organisational restructuring in the past; some successful, some not so successful. My approach to work had always been very task focused, and in the organisation I spent my earlier formative leadership years in, this type of approach was supported over and above more people-orientated approaches. In one of my first experiences with restructure, my team took a very direct almost clinical approach, which did not result in a very smooth transition. I also learnt at that time that we had wrongly assumed the reactions of some staff; where we thought they would be pleased they retained their roles, however the reality was, that they wanted redundancy.

I then had the opportunity to work under another senior public sector leader during another restructuring process, where their leadership style was much more people-orientated through a focus on vision, communication and people. It was through this process I truly saw the impact that utilising soft-skills could make in the facilitation of change. By not prejudging people's reactions and by getting to know your staff on a much deeper personal level, we were much more aware of the issues at hand and resulted in a much smoother successful change transition. By having that experience, I was able to see first-hand that building soft-skills and enhancing active listening skills, was able to shape the relationships with staff, providing an ability to have much deeper and more meaningful conversations about the change.

Ever since this experience, I had approached change management with a focus on people, vision and communication as my founding principles. I approach the process by being transparent and clear a long time ahead about how and why we are going to prioritise, and hold ourselves as a leadership team to account for principles and why they are important. It can be difficult to always be transparent, especially if things are really tough, however you can draw back to values and communicate vision as a way of aligning towards future goals.

Questions

- What challenges have you faced as leader when implementing change in an organisation?
- What leadership lessons have you learnt either as a person undergoing change, or implementing change?

Message from a leader

Transparency

- By gaining the trust of your staff, you are able to facilitate change at a faster pace and with less resistance. By being transparent, you provide staff with less opportunity to perceive the situation in a skewed fashion and equip them with more control.