



DR PAUL BREWERTON GIVES ADVICE ON THE PROS AND CONS OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE CHANGE WITHIN THE RAF, AND AN INSIGHT INTO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CULTURAL CHANGE.

The reference project for this article relates to the merged Royal Air Force Headquarters in High Wycombe, a change programme affecting several thousand service and civilian staff. In 2007, The Royal Air Force completed the process of merging its two Command Headquarters (Strike Command and Personnel and Training Command) at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire in a drive to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Strike Command was already located at High Wycombe, but the Personnel and Training Command was still at Innsworth in Gloucestershire, nearly 100 miles away.

To ensure the success of the merger and co-location, work was carried out to identify the key cultural issues and manage the change as part of the RAF's desire to introduce improved ways of working. In terms of diagnostic methods, initially, focus groups and interviews were run with different stakeholder groups to assess views on a range of issues relating to culture to find out how employees felt about and saw the organisation from both historic and future perspectives. The HQ organisation was asked to participate in a survey to identify the gaps between the two current headquarters and the ideal future state.

Facilitating a unified and integrated structure, Blue Edge subsequently designed and facilitated interviews and workshops for all ten members of the senior management team (Air Vice Marshall and equivalent civilian grade) in readiness for the co-location of the two HQs. Two facilitators were used to establish the critical interdependencies between the HQs and provide engaging and hard hitting workshops that improved team cohesion and focus.

Implementing the new culture was achieved by working in partnership with the RAF's own internal change team, a newly integrated culture has now been implemented and the relocation successfully completed with many benefits including: development of a reliable and valid measure of culture at the two headquarters and assessing behaviour, values and assumptions across the organisation.

The RAF was able to accurately identify any gaps between its current culture and future culture, allowing resources to be directed appropriately. Differences between groups and HQs were objectively assessed to maximise chances of successful harmonisation through the collocation process. Participation of all staff communicated a positive message of consultation and inclusion. Areas of good practice were able to be identified and used to shape decisions on new processes and procedures within the co-located HQs.

Results were designed to be mapped directly onto wider organisational development initiatives (e.g. 'Improved Ways of Working') to provide a barometer of progress. Interviews and workshops were designed and facilitated to achieve full integration of the RAF senior management team prior to relocation.

The relocation and culture change at the RAF has been successfully managed to completion and Blue Edge continues to work in partnership with the RAF change team, regularly re-assessing the culture to ensure change is embedded and long-lasting. This experience with the Royal Air Force and with other organisations such as the Crossrail project and Police Service of Northern Ireland demonstrated that in order to successfully change entrenched cultures to new and higher levels of performance there are a number of crucial factors that need to be considered.

How to initiate and implement successful cultural change:

- Work out where you want to be. At the outset, run vision and value workshops with the top team
- Engage the CEO fully and develop a clear strategy and well defined cultural blueprint for the future
- Use one-to-one interviews with board members to gain a full understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- The vision and strategy requires buy-in from the entire team, and to achieve that a 'burning platform' or other key driver is essential.

Firstly, find out how far you are away and how deep you need to go. This is the vital diagnostic stage. There are various measurement tools available to assess the current state of an organisation's culture, including the Denison Organisational Culture Survey, Human Synergetics' Organisational Culture Inventory and Blue Edge's Performance Culture Audit. These tools permit a variable degree of tailoring to the precise requirements of the organisation being audited, although experience shows that some customisation is always needed to fully capture the complexities and unique nature of each organisation. For the RAF, an organisation-specific measurement tool was created which was built from the bottom up to capture all aspects of the HQ's aspirational future culture. The audit should be supplemented by focus groups with a cross section of staff, and one-to-one interviews with senior managers.

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Getting commitment to change from the management team. The culture audit and its findings are reported to the senior management team, and the gaps and problem areas identified. It is vital to get a programme of change measures and targets agreed at the highest level, in terms of how this will be achieved, when it will be done and how success will be measured.

Ensure the HR department uses all the tools at their disposal. Changing the culture will always require changes to the HR management systems. Reward, recognition and promotion systems need to match up to the new culture (e.g. for Orange, the directors' bonus was tied to the introduction of the 'Orange Way' of doing things across all countries). New structures, values and competencies may need to be developed, and selection systems to ensure the right cultural fit for potential future leaders and new recruits. Communicate the new culture thoroughly to all managers and staff.

An internal change manager with drive and enthusiasm needs to be appointed at the outset to ensure team briefings are properly carried out, and staff comments get fed back and properly dealt with by management.

Embedding change is achieved by adopting the new systems and processes, and ensuring new competencies are backed up by behavioural and skills training fully aligned with the new culture. Leadership and management development and communications training may also be required. Re-evaluation needs to take place after a reasonable period by carrying out a 'pulse audit' of all staff, focusing on the issues identified as vital to the change. Further initiatives may be required in areas of weakness or reluctance to change: cultural change, like all important aspects of business, requires work and nurturing to be successful.



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MAINTAINING A GOOD CULTURE DURING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

GARETH CHICK, DIRECTOR SPRING PARTNERSHIPS GIVES HIS ADVICE ON COPING CULTURALLY.

One of the ways that HR directors can manage organisational change and ensure that employee culture remains intact and morale high is to remember the cycle of grief change model discovered originally by Elizabeth Kubler Ross. This is the five-stage psychological cycle people go through in order to accept a dramatic change in their person life and is relevant for any situation where people suffer trauma as a result of an unexpected event such as redundancy, organisational restructure and change.

1. The cycle starts with the immediate emotional reaction to the news with shock and denial. People in shock do not hear things straight and go into immediate denial. When delivering the news, the message needs to be simple. The clearer the message, the sooner they will hear it. If the reaction is met with denial then the news needs to be repeated.
2. Once the person is ready to move out of denial, they move into anger. This is natural, even if they agree with the decision! They are angry because their life has been disrupted and they are now out of control. Someone is to blame. Managers will be blamed; the company will surely be blamed too. This is not the time to argue. Employees should be given free rein to express their anger. This is, however, the time to empathise and to demonstrate understanding about their anger.
3. Dialogue and bargaining is the next stage in the cycle. This is their way of taking control back. Whilst they might still be quite emotional, they will now be more rational and open to debating. This is not the time to go back on any element of the original decision, however appealing it might be given how reasonable the employee is being.
4. The next frustrating stage is depression and detachment. Just when people are all positive about the parts of the new plan that they can own and design, and it seems as though the fight's over, they all go quiet. They look defeated, beaten and down. But people simply need a little space, empathy and understanding here before the cycle can move on.
5. In employment situations, this depression and detachment does not last long. People eventually get fed up of feeling low, and it only takes one person, one leader-for-a-day, within the group to stand up one day and say 'come on guys, let's get on with it', and the cohort is ready to move. A good HR director will spot the leader for that stage and encourage them. And move they do – on to acceptance and this is when business will be ready to move forward with motivated staff on board.

Using the cycle of grief model HR directors will be able to empathise with staff and get them re-motivated, back on track, with morale high and the office culture completely undamaged.

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