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Case Study: From 'Necessary Evil' to 'Trusted Business Partner'

Background

- Information Systems (IS) support function of organisation with 34,000 employees.
- Long-service culture meets performance culture of the city.
- Proliferation of IS related change with little / no architecture supporting it, spiralling costs, extremely poor reputation within the business, improve or outsource. . .
- Transitioning from current state of 'Necessary Evil' to desired future state of 'Trusted Business Partner'.
- Extremely strong sponsorship for change, with powerful combination between leader of IS and his HR Director. Dedicated Transformation Team – well-resourced, energetic, co-located, skilled.
- Many employees disengaged, cynical, some evidence of learned-helplessness. Widespread feeling that change has been badly managed in the past and 'leaders don't stay here long'.

The Purpose of Our Work

- To engage employees in the process of change.
- To give them a voice, to tell their own stories.
- To surface current state perspectives.
- To provide a reference point for measuring change success.

Our Approach

- A total of 120 people involved in focus group sessions.
- Up to 20 people from across the function for each 3 hour workshop.
- Primary focus = current state mapping.
- Scene setting for the session included reference to this as the start of an ongoing process. Key sponsors opened and closed the session – honesty encouraged.

People were asked to create a visual representation of the current state using craft-type materials. Each group then told the stories of the models they made.

How The Information Was Used

The results of the mapping exercise were presented to the leadership team, using a Structure, Process, People, Culture mapping format, brought to life using the 3D models people had created (including a gun created out of pipe cleaners – 'don't shoot the messenger'). A written report was also produced, including direct quotations from participants, their stories as told in their words, and their wishes for the future. The leader's copy was covered in notes – underlinings, crossings out, question marks. For a number of months he carried it everywhere he went . . .

The Benefits

People demonstrated real honesty and passion for the organisation, and were pleased to have their voices heard.

'It allowed me to realise other people have similar views and also want to make it happen'
'I was allowed to contribute – normally changes have been thrust on me'
'Very candid / open / honest'

The mapping process gave very personal insight to people's experiences and perspectives, and created a shared urgency for change between sponsors, change agents and employees throughout the organisation.

'Climbing a mountain in flip flops'
'Canoeing in different directions'
'The dark art of business cases and budgeting'
'Brickwalls, silos and mazes'
'It's always 11.59 on the clock'

The use of craft-type materials had enabled people to talk about their experiences in a way that might not otherwise have been possible. The approach helped to quickly 'break the ice' within groups. As people picked up materials and started to work with them they became more at ease. And their stories and experiences started to flow . . .

The Results

The Transformation Programme we contributed to resulted in:

- Costs being halved
- Performance being quadrupled
- The organisation winning Computing Awards 'IT Employer of the Year'

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