

Networking is way forward

In the last of a five-part series on managing change, *Becky Hall* shows how to network with colleagues

THE MOST important thing in making change easier on a personal level is getting to know new colleagues. Networking has always had an important role in large organisations, but never more so than now.

You need to get to know your colleagues from different units, departments and directorates – but how? Very few organisations have staff relaxation rooms, so staff rarely meet colleagues from a different professional discipline unless they are working directly with them. Moreover, for some people, the idea of meeting new colleagues is challenging, especially if they are feeling worried about the future and uncertain about change.

Supported environment

Some organisations recognise the need for structured networking and, when this happens, the process will be facilitated for you. This is ideal, as it takes the emphasis off personalities and individuals and allows you to meet colleagues in a supported environment.

We have organised many networking events and conferences for organisations to bring together staff from a range of different backgrounds, disciplines and expertise, and for them to participate in creative, reflective and interactive activities together, in order to make useful and effective contacts and partnerships.

In my experience, staff always come away from networking events having met and made many productive contacts which lead to some exciting inter-organisational working. They also reassure staff about change and take the threat out of the idea of some of the new ways of working.

Some of the most exciting networking I have seen have been team led – involving teams identifying another team from within the organisation that it would be helpful for them to work with and setting up work shadowing and professional



sharing sessions. There is nothing like spending time shadowing a colleague – "a day in the life" – to get a sense of their role and their approach. Staff can then feed this back to their teams, giving a bigger view of the other team's activity. If two teams can "twin up", they can also hold sharing sessions, where each presents their work to the other. This may lead to partnership working, or it may simply demystify the professional distance between the teams that can so often feel intimidating.

Information sharing

Finally, you can network individually. If you are aware that it would be helpful for you to know someone in another area, why not email them and suggest sharing information about your roles? This can be done online or face to face and provides structure and purpose to meeting new colleagues.

You can also set up networking-based mentoring with colleagues, where staff pair up across professional disciplines to support and advise each other about different professional approaches.

Successful organisational change is so often helped or hindered by personal reactions to it, and networking can be an ideal way of taking the threat out of the uncertain future. You may also make some meaningful partnerships and good friends along the way.

"Networking can help take the threat out of an uncertain future"

Ways to network

ORGANISATIONAL EVENTS

Why not ask your managers to consider hosting a networking day with colleagues and peers from outside your immediate service or division? You could even select the services that it would be helpful to talk about and meet people from these divisions.

TEAM NETWORKING

Why not suggest that your team shadows a parallel team from another professional discipline? This will not only expand your network, but could allow you to develop and share good practice. Knowing what colleagues in other areas do in detail can be a really productive way of finding opportunities for partnership and joint working.

INDIVIDUAL NETWORKING

If you are aware that you do not know much about a profession that you are meant to be forming partnerships with, why not contact a colleague and suggest sharing information, or even mentoring each other in your own professional discipline?

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