

Session 5

CASE STUDY: IMPACT OF A MAJOR CHANGE INITIATIVE ON A TEAM OF CHANGE-AGENTS.

Mrs Rebecca Crosbie, Ms Janice Burmaz

Curtin University

Universities are in a constant state of flux. In recent years there has been rapid growth and change to internal business processes and the way this is conducted. Change is inevitable. Most literature is based around the impact of change on the people affected or the process itself, not on the change-agents.

This paper aims to reflect on the lessons learnt from the impact of a major change initiative on a team of change-agents.

Staff tend to be concerned when words such as “new system”, “change management” or “management decision” come up in casual conversations or in a message from a vice-chancellor. This case study highlights some life-long lessons (and a few minor grazes) for a team of change-agents to use for the future.

As one of the change-agent areas within Curtin, the Organisational Development Unit (ODU) is often tasked with the rollout portion of a project including project management, coordination and in most instances developing and facilitating training. In this case, ODU was given the responsibility to lead the implementation phase of a new system, including developing and delivering appropriate training – which seemed simple at the outset. However, a perfect storm was approaching for which we were mildly aware and prepared.

ODU became involved at the mid stages of a new system rollout which was to affect most academics and some general staff. ODU was aware of: the need to rapidly roll out the new system in accord with strict timelines; that the Unit’s minimal involvement in prior discussions on policy or background and the need to get up to speed quickly; the need to address the resourcing, expertise and workload implications that would affect the ODU team.

The tide slowly crept in -there were upfront delays due to EBA negotiations for which ODU had no control; a major change in executive management and the project sponsor; a new project team; a difference in working relationships/personalities within the team; and varying understandings of the project from all involved. Most observers wondered if this was a ‘wipe-out’ waiting to happen, this didn’t!

As a result of the team’s reflection on this change initiative positive outcomes arose including a renewed energy and passion for the Units change-agent role and its need for earlier involvement with University change management. Although no broken bones the ODU team is more robust with only a few fading scars left to remind us of what has passed. Individual team members also grew, both personally and professionally, at different levels throughout this process.

Though this project is still ongoing, a university-wide approach to change management would be great. The authors believe an effective communication strategy with more team and area cross collaboration will ensure early establishment of good change management practices are instilled in future projects.

This paper focuses on how the ODU team navigated through the stormy waters of a major change initiative within Curtin. It examines its preparations, the impact on the ODU team and the lessons learned – scars and all.

Presenter Biography

Rebecca Crosbie is a new consultant within Organisational Development at Curtin University, focusing on the development of general staff. She has a background in administration, human resources and recruitment within the Mining and private sectors. Rebecca has a passion for helping staff to develop their skills, knowledge and experience to help them with their professional and career development. She has completed a Graduate Certificate in Business and Diploma of Management as well as numerous short courses.

Janice Burmaz commenced at Curtin in 2000 as Office Administrator with the Planning Office. She moved on to become Program Coordinator for the Leadership Development and Women's Programs. In 2007 the Organisational Development Unit was formed and she became one of the Consultants within this unit. She has a varied portfolio however the main areas are around supporting organisational development and change management initiatives including leadership and management development for professional staff, general staff skills based training and more recently, academic pathways project, mentoring and advancing senior women at Curtin initiatives. Janice also facilitates in-house training include performance management and recruitment & selection workshops as well as the odd "team development day or three. Janice has a Diploma of Teaching (Primary) and a Graduate Certificate in Business (with Leadership and Management). Prior to working at Curtin, Janice was a primary school teacher and worked for various WA Government departments and private institutions.