

Session 7

FROM HEARTBREAK TO HAPPY ENDINGS: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR ICEBERG STARTS TO MELT - NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT AND MANAGING CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

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UniSA is a large, multi-campus university in South Australia with four distinct academic divisions: Information Technology, Engineering and the Environment (ITEE); Education, Arts and Social Sciences (EASS); Health Sciences; and Business. Over the last twenty years UniSA has undergone a rapid period of growth which has necessitated quick, though sometimes inconsistent, development of our systems, processes and services.

To provide solutions for addressing these inconsistencies, UniSA initiated a project to build a whole-of-organisation service foundation. The project commenced in 2009 and will conclude in 2012, focusing on one academic division at a time and building on outcomes as it moves through the organisation. The project applies examples of good practice from across the University and externally, examining administrative processes across workplaces, mapping and testing new processes, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and developing clear guidelines and service standards.

In its development stage, the project steering group rejected the notion that services can be improved simply by an increase in budget or resources. Instead, it directed that the project should seek more effective ways of managing professional capabilities to maximise service outputs without an increase in budget or wholesale reduction of staff numbers.

The central aim of the project is to reduce the non-academic administration work for academics; however, it has also led to a marked reduction in duplicated work, clearer roles and responsibilities, and comprehensive guidelines for responsibilities and accountabilities.

The structural and cultural change that the project necessitates is complex and sometimes divisive, and often exacerbated by the complexities of carrying out such a project in a higher education institution. The imperative for a rigorous framework to shape the project led to the adoption of Kotter's "Eight step process for successful change" which presents us with a way of thinking about how to manage change more effectively. His work includes some salient reminders about the importance of communication, widespread engagement, strong leadership and vision, detailed planning, and the value of trial and error. This paper discusses how our adoption of Kotter's framework to a simple business improvement methodology led to the development of a new service model at UniSA.

The extent of organisational development proposed for the project requires significant collaboration and consultation, so engagement and communication with stakeholders has been paramount, and widespread efforts are made to seek input and share outcomes. A distinctive feature of activities was the two-way nature of its development: staff are able to access information through a range of media and forums, and contribute to the project's development by sharing their ideas and opinions with other colleagues from across the University.

This paper will discuss the project's inception and development, achievements and shortcomings, and propose strategies for sinking or swimming should your iceberg begin to melt. It will contribute to the knowledge and understanding about how large organisations might improve their service levels, whilst concurrently creating positive change in a culture of continuous improvement. And then embedding continuous change in a culture of positive improvement!

Presenters Biography:

Lucy Schulz has worked for UniSA since 1990 in a range of roles, culminating in her current position as the Director: Service Improvement, responsible for a corporate project to develop a new service delivery model for the University's administrative activities. Previously she was Director: Student and Academic Services and Academic Registrar, a position she held from 2002.

Lucy has also been the University's Quality and Change Manager, providing advice to staff and management on effective approaches to quality systems, organisational change, innovation and management.

She finished her Masters degree in human resources in 2000 focusing specifically on organisational culture and values in the context of change management.

Simon Behenna is the Senior Analyst: Change and Communication for the UniSA Service Improvement project, which aims to improve the University's administrative processes and practices. He has worked at UniSA since 2000 in a variety of roles including as a tutor, as a writer and website developer, as Executive Officer to Pro Vice Chancellors, and as the Consultant: Student Equity. During that time he has participated in many large-scale projects and been privy to extensive institutional change.

He has a BA (Hons) in Professional Writing and has almost completed a Doctorate in Communication, examining the use of new technologies in modern workplaces.