

Session 7

EMPOWERMENT TO ENGAGEMENT - A JOURNEY

Ms Wendy Chambers, Mr Stephen Rothman

University of Auckland

“Engagement is a symptom of organisational health” (Shaun McCarthy “What Drives Engagement” - Employment Today, Dec 2010/Jan 2011).

In 2005 as a way to reinvigorate our teams and strengthen our own management skills the Group Managers in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland embarked on a fresh approach. How could we motivate and reward staff in a way that didn't involve money? The result was a long term, multi-faceted project with the broad aims of developing in administrative staff a sense of ownership of Faculty administration processes and influence over outcomes. Six years down the track the benefits have eclipsed the original objectives.

This presentation outlines the journey under the four main themes: Culture of Learning, Being Valued, Cross Functional Teams and Continuous Improvement. We will also discuss practices that were innovative and are now standard in the Faculty and the on-going benefits, which include a University wide recognition of best practice in these areas within the Faculty of Arts.

Culture of Learning

Initially this involved designing courses for staff to help grow staff awareness of the projects aims.

“How to work effectively in Cross Functional Project Teams” was our first course.

This has developed into a Faculty Professional Development Committee and a budget that provides funds to administrative staff for external training (for groups or individuals), and conference attendance.

We now have the capacity to design our own courses with University providers and external training organisations. These courses provide opportunities for administrative staff to be introduced to best practice in a range of related activities, for example Event Management.

In this presentation we will expand on the benefits to staff and discuss other opportunities the funds provide, for example the Faculty Mini Conference.

Cross Functional Teams

Cross functional teams have been the key to encouraging genuine engagement of administrative staff within the Faculty. These teams are a mix of administrative staff at all levels. They work on projects, contribute to the work of committees and are significantly helping the Faculty meet its strategic objectives. The presentation will provide examples of how this works in practice.

Being Valued

A project team was established to develop ways to help staff feel more appreciated. This project coincided with a staff survey which demonstrated to staff that we valued their input.

This survey made it clear that being valued for their individual contributions was what gave administrative staff the most personal satisfaction. The day to day work of administrative staff often is focused on efficiency and outputs. We have attempted to shift this focus towards staff exercising authority and experiencing variety which, as Shaun McCarthy notes in his article “What Drives Engagement”, are the two key requirements for human motivation.

Along with some interesting ideas on how to informally reward people we will discuss structural changes to Faculty Administration (giving staff increased opportunity to exercise authority) that can be directly linked to the work done on how we value staff.

Continuous Improvement

One of our first initiatives was to introduce the concept of continuous improvement to the Faculty. The Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) is now embedded in the Faculty in the guise of the “Good Ideas Group”. An objective of the original project was to empower staff to participate in process development and the “Good Ideas Group” is the most successful manifestation of the CIP process in the University. It has provided 47% of all the CIP suggestions received in the University with the majority of these suggestions being made by our administrative staff.

We will discuss how we raised staff awareness around the identification of waste in administrative processes and linked this to the concept of continuous improvement and how the “Good Ideas Group” works.

Our presentation will provide details of the journey, the obstacles, the successes and the outcomes, in what we believe has been a cultural change in a traditional university hierarchy.

Presenters Biography

Wendy Chambers is now Faculty Manager in the Faculty of Engineering, but for 10 years was a Group Manager in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland.

Stephen Rothman has been a Group Manager in the Faculty of Arts for 7 years.