

Commitment to Culture Change



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Organisation: New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs

Country: New Zealand

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Human Resources, Organisational Design

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 3 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) is a long-standing core New Zealand government department. It employs over 2000 people across 49 sites and fulfils one of the broadest portfolios in government with six Ministers and oversight of around 100 pieces of legislation.

Historically, DIA had operated as a number of separate business units where each area could operate pretty much in isolation from other parts of DIA. There were many times when, through this approach, opportunities were lost and greater efficiency and effectiveness could have been achieved if DIA had operated as a coherent, and unified whole.

In 2012, the Departments staff engagement score, a key indicator of a successful organisational culture, was one of the lowest in the New Zealand public sector (9.3% of people were engaged, 56.6% were ambivalent and 34.1% were disengaged).

The recent and ongoing shift in the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) culture is significant enough to warrant understanding and sharing. Over the years 2012 to 2015 DIA had a 155% increase in engaged people, and is now above the New Zealand public sector benchmark on key engagement drivers, including confidence in leadership.

This is the story of the culture shift that took place throughout DIA. It aims to paint a picture of what happened and to set out the elements that underpin the successful changes.

Why the innovation was developed

- It was clear from staff engagement surveys run by IBM Kenexa, and an external review of departmental performance undertaken in 2012 that DIA needed a step-change in both performance and culture.
 - DIA was facing some organisational challenges. The National Library and Archives New Zealand were incorporated into the department in February 2011, leading to a 30% increase in size of the department and a significant increase in complexity.
 - DIA had historically underinvested in leadership development. Previous attempts to promote the organisation's values were not embraced by the wider staff and a shared vision was lacking; in part due to the 'top down' nature of the values and also because DIA is an extremely diverse organisation making it difficult to create a sense of common purpose.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality

- The leaders in DIA set out to galvanise and inspire the people in DIA to embrace a common purpose, values and priorities to ensure the expectations of ministers and the community were met and, if possible, exceeded.
 - The people in DIA needed to see that they were part of one organisation that had the focus and drive necessary for the department to excel. They needed to be aware of the benefits of this approach, not only to them personally in their roles, but also what improvements were possible to the services they provide to the community.
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Main beneficiaries

General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- This is an innovation that affects all parts of the department.
- All stakeholders from staff, users of day-to-day services such as applicants for passports, and ministers have benefited.

Results

Other improvements

- DIA has been collecting a range of evidence which indicates a positive culture shift that is leading to an organisation with a common sense of purpose.
- The culture change programme has led to the following key shifts: From: Our leadership team has all the answers, To: We don't know all the answers, let's ask for some help. From: Delivering something perfect, To: Giving it a go. From: Being talked at, To: Being listened to. From: "They won't understand" mindset, To: "Let's ask them what they think" mindset. From: Underinvestment in leadershipTo: Leadership development is business-as-usual. From: Telling people to do something, To: Trusting people to do the right thing. From: End points, To: Ongoing evolution. From: Not knowing where to start, To: Just getting started. From: Values provided, To: Values owned. From: Principles as words, To: Principles as ways of being. From: Being wedded to a particular way, To: Trusting others to develop their own way.

Development

Design

The innovation was generated and led by the Chief Executive and his leadership team. The story of change began in 2012 with the arrival of the new Chief Executive.

For DIA's Executive Leadership Team (ELT), the imperative to create a culture change was in direct response to this negative information – a feeling that was widely accepted across the department. The low engagement scores were catalysts for the changes the Chief Executive and his executive wanted to see embedded in the organisation.

Despite having a clear vision about what needed to be achieved, The Department's leadership is open about the fact that, in the beginning, they did not know the details of what the change might actually be in practice. For a large part of the change process, they were leading the organisation into uncharted territory and they were cognisant that this might be uncomfortable for some.

For change to occur, the leadership team was comfortable with stepping into the unknown, leaving some room for getting it wrong and always being prepared to receive feedback to close the learning loop.

Testing

- One of the key successes of the DIA change process was that it was structured around authentically listening to the voice of staff. The workshops became a democratic forum for giving people a voice, as well as an opportunity for staff members to meet and talk to the organisation's leadership.
 - There was a lot of feedback from people saying that for the first time in a long time they felt that they were being listened to. For the leadership team, it was a bold move to place full trust in staff to provide the content for the organisational principles and behaviours.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- To kick-off the programme of change, the leadership team led an ambitious series of 30 workshops across New Zealand, London and Sydney over five months in 2012 - 2013. These workshops were redesigned to create an open line of communication between the organisation's leadership and their people.
- The workshops were designed and supported by the Department's internal Human Resources and Communications teams. The analysis of the huge amount of qualitative data resulted in a number of key themes.
- These initiatives gave DIA a sense that something was underway, with the real work – the implementation and action phase – set to start. To strengthen the department's collateral and to help bring the core principles to life, a 'home' theme was developed. The theme imparts a sense of belonging and provides a relatable framework for presenting the core concepts.
- An expo style event, including a tradeshow, was held to unveil the new principles and 'home' theme and to bring the diverse range of DIA people together. It was a celebration of the change process and an opportunity to step out of business-as-usual and meet and greet others across DIA. Mini versions of the event and tradeshow were taken to Auckland, Christchurch and other smaller regional offices as well.
- Building our Story was the next phase in DIA's culture shift journey. The aim was to encourage people to leverage off the stronger organisational culture to build better ways of working across the department.
- Four focus areas were developed by DIA leadership as a way to connect people (culture) with improving their day-to-day work (strategy). After re-energising staff engagement, DIA needed to increase its strategic focus, to help break down silos and bring people together.
- Again, all people were invited to attend workshops to connect their work with any one or more of the following focus areas: Transform service delivery; Strong communities; Trusted information; DIA is fit for purpose.

Resources used:

- Work to design the innovation was carried out internally, mostly by the Human Resources and Internal Communication groups. External assistance was engaged from time to time to provide expert advice and independent review.
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Diffusion

- This innovation has been openly shared with other state sector organisations through the use of case studies and articles in journals, and presentations at conferences and seminars.

Challenges and solutions

- Addressing organisational roadblocks and bureaucratic red tape was a focus through an online channel called 'Tackling Bureaucracy'. People were invited to submit issues and ideas that were blocking them in achieving the desired culture. However these suggestions were sometimes left unaddressed and the process never gained traction. People submitted what they thought needed to change or be better, but then went into a black hole.
 - Thinking about how to address this, and enabling people to take ownership of issues they have control over, is a key area DIA now plans to focus on
 - Another challenge was that staff found it difficult to connect the focus areas to their work. This was possibly because it was a top down process, i.e. people were being told about the focus areas, rather than having input into creating them.
 - Work still needs to be done to help people understand the importance of the focus areas for DIA and how they can work across silos.
 - Pulse surveys indicate that the 'line of sight' between what people do, and their connection to the overall organisational strategy increased, however maintaining this clarity is an ongoing challenge for DIA.
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Partnerships

IBM Kenexa

Private sector

IBM Kenexa provide DIA's engagement surveys. Other external assistance was engaged from time to time to provide expert advice and independent review.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Change takes time and a long term view is important – "it is a marathon, not a sprint".
 - Just because an organisation is big and diverse doesn't mean you can't engage with people – find a way.
 - Buy-in works well when concepts are co-created.
 - People value being listened to and understood and having their messages reflected back to them.
 - Just get started and move at pace to maintain energy around a change process.
 - You don't need to know all the answers at the start – don't be afraid to make a leap, be curious, listen, and let that set the course of action.
 - If you want people to embrace the message, keep it simple, lively and accessible.
 - Visible leadership is critical to showing that you are serious and dedicated to the cause.
 - Graphic design can bring ideas to life and demonstrate a sense of commitment to the work
 - Leaders should walk the talk – people are committed to those who demonstrate authenticity.
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Conditions for success

- Just get started: Don't wait too long and don't make it too perfect. Whatever it is that you embark upon, do it honestly and it will generate its own momentum.
 - Be comfortable about stepping into the unknown Despite having a clear vision about what needed to be achieved, the change leaders were open that they did know the details of what the change might actually be in practice
 - Leaders need to be front and centre One of the golden rules of culture change is that leadership needs to be front and centre. The approach was intentional, consistent, coherent, relentless and driven.
 - Support and cohesion of the leadership team is critical It was important that the leadership team understood the messages of change and relay these messages to the rest of the organisation.
 - Listen with authenticity and trust in the voice of your people The workshops became a forum for giving people a voice, as well as an opportunity for staff members to meet and talk to leaders.
 - Pace can be powerful Maintaining momentum signalled to the entire organisation that the engagement process was being undertaken seriously.
 - Leave some room for creativity Creativity sometimes requires a long leash to provide the space to operate innovatively.
 - Lead with the positive Use positive language and strive to counteract cynicism.
 - Maximise opportunities and connections Use every step and opportunity to reinforce the message.
 - Make small ongoing improvements Big shifts are the sum of all the small meaningful improvements that you make along the way.
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