Performance enabling at Swansea University

The project was focused on improving performance of staff via engagement and culture change with the objective of being a top 30 institution by 2017.

Critical Success Factors

1. Communications strategy and intense process of engagement

180 sessions were conducted with trade unions, management and staff and this informed the plan and engagement strategy. A total of 940 staff attended consultations as part of the implementation to assist culture change. Trade unions and staff were initially suspicious of the programme, particularly the use of individual KPIs – internal engagement changed this. Asking the question 'What should replace the appraisal?' was very effective way of challenging and working with the unions. This resulted in cross institutional ownership of HR by non-HR Leaders, and allowed for a more radical approach.

2. Supporting process of change in institution

Many academics have worked in one organisation for a long time, and a process of engagement built relationships that would enable the process of change. There was a strong relationship between Director of HR and Head of Trade Union. A holistic approach supported change: it was about every single member of staff and helping them improve performance. After year 1 we consulted on what gone well, what needs to be stopped, what needs to be improved – staff were involved in shaping the journey.

3. IT and database on KPIs

A simple to use system enabled academics to amend and correct their own data. This led to improved quality of data, which helped with delivery for the REF and other business areas. The underlying the technical solution, however, was complex with five systems contributing to one front-end system holding the PDR report.

4. Focus on academic staff

Improving staff performance is a key driver for the local economy and university. It is the first time data has been available for performance review and has enabled benchmark setting.

5. Academic KPIs

A new suite of KPIs mean that each academic's contribution to the performance of the institution can be measured. KPIs include: Publications, Grant Applications, PhD Students, Student retention, Student Outcomes, Student Feedback.

6. Leadership

The programme has been led by the Director of HR and Deputy Director of HR who have successfully implemented cultural change in the private sector. The programme also incorporated best practice elements from other institutions.

Key outputs

- Every individual's contribution to the REF preparation exercises measured and directly linked to their PDR.
- KPIs introduced and refined for academic members of staff.
- 98% of senior line managers trained on the legal aspect of performance.
- 70% of reviewers trained in a coaching approach to assist effective discussion.
- 79% of PDRs were completed in the first year and 90% in year 2 against around 25% previously.
- Systematic evaluation of perceived impact: 89% believed the quality of the review had improved in year 2.

Project details

Savings: Operational Efficiency Greater output for the same input	**Improved performance from same staff resource:** League Table position based on student surveys improved. NSS results: Swansea's score for "overall satisfaction" is 87%, up from 82% last year, 42nd out of 136, up 38 places. Swansea rose 12 places to 45th in the Sunday Times Guide. No grievances, action or formal complaints were made as result of implementation.
Progress: outcomes	Completion rates of PDRs have risen - 90% in year 2 against around 25% previously. Improved management information and data 1,129 publications on the database since July. Improved PDR discussion using KPI data and training for managers in coaching techniques.
Progress: medium and longer term	Maximise submission to REF – numbers of academic staff not submitted reduced by 50%. Year on year improvements to 2017 in student satisfaction, student attainment outcomes and student non-completion rates. Year on year rise in research income.
Progress: long term	Impact on league tables so that Swansea will be in the top 30 institutions by 2017.
Cost of Change – cost of managing / implementing changes	0.87 FTE (Deputy Director of HE); 0.5 FTE + 0.3 FTE IT support Total cost per year = £74,726 Contributions from a range of staff in a number of departments

	and HR team.
Time taken to realise benefits – (short term and long term issues)	Two years into process – 25% to 90% completion rates on PDRs. Aim is to improve REF performance, be a top 30 institution by 2017.
Unanticipated consequences – good and bad	**Challenges**: **Lack of resource** Resourced through a matrix structure; IT colleagues; analysts working on KPIs; Research team looking at research data. Relying on goodwill for people to do this as part of the day job as no resource / funding for a project team. A consequence of lack of resource: project was focused. But did mean some areas were not covered until later (e.g. reward management) and the programme could have been accelerated. **Line Management:** needed to be clarified who these people were, then provide training (the "how"). **Feedback from staff:** 30% of staff not challenged on things they expected to be challenged on. **Benefits:** Improving quality of data. **Changed status of HR within the university:** Award from UHR: HR function is now seen as vital for business, can help colleagues deliver.
Future plans	The Programme will drive cultural change over a 5 year period.

More information

We believe that our approach could be usefully applied to work relating to performance being undertaken in other institutions. We are happy to disseminate the scheme more widely via the Efficiency Exchange, UHR and via other opportunities.

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