



A Change of View

Peter Horrocks, Vice-Chancellor at The Open University and former Director at the BBC World Service Group, tells **Mary-Anne Baldwin** what he's learned from the major change programmes he has led

Some years ago, when I was head of BBC Television News, we developed a plan to become multiplatform – so the newsroom you see behind the news readers, the way of working, the technology and culture, were all things I put in place.

The main problems related to skills and culture; people thought of themselves as a TV or a radio person and we needed to make a case to move towards a holistic approach. There were a couple of thousand people involved and it took about a year.

Some of my fellow senior colleagues told me that to go in this direction would be to take leave of our senses.

Lots of people believed that the audience want great radio journalism from us and we've got great people in radio, so why confuse things. That argument was held at many different levels.

There was also a belief that some teams would win out and some teams would lose, so I had to reassure people that everyone would benefit.

Leading the Way

The key to achieving change was to get the most prominent people – such as the BBC's former political editor, Nick Robinson and its former economics editor, Robert Peston – enthusiastic about it. That meant appealing to their

natural instinct to get their stories in front of as many people as possible.

Once everybody saw that the BBC's most famous journalists were adopting a multichannel approach the scepticism fell. That was significant to delivering the programme on time and making 25 per cent savings.

The BBC's change programme benefited from being able to demonstrate quick results both internally and publicly. For example, the BBC's Science Editor, David Shukman, would go to extraordinary parts of the world to report on climate change or the effect of plastic bags on the oceans and that would generate wonderful pictures, great descriptive >



radio and fascinating graphics for the BBC's online news site. When people saw that editorial they could see the advantages of working in a multimedia way.

And, when the BBC was publicly celebrated as the leading source of digital journalism – that was reward for all the tough decisions and big changes.

That's in some contrast to the field that I now work in. Universities are slower so it will take a lot longer for people to be able to see the consequences of the changes I'm putting in place. It's not as public as the BBC Newsroom.

I'm entirely new to the university sector but have decided to move forward quickly with some of the change processes. It will take time to get buy-in but I wanted some quick wins. I was chosen for having a reputation for delivering change quickly, and that enabled me to go forward with more momentum.

TIPS ON SUCCESSFUL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- Assess the existing skills and culture
- Create workshops in which staff can discuss issues
- Communicate the benefits of the programme
- Bring staff together so they can appreciate the holistic view
- Find 'Champions of Change'
- Celebrate the wins with inspiring examples
- Get an honest assessment by measuring buy-in through numerous means

“ Understand change from the perspective of those it affects ”

The academics at the Open University want to be able to deliver digital in a way that students can learn directly from. Without knowing code, the tutors can very simply create online learning resources and see for themselves what that would look like. That allows them to be more creative but also more responsive to what the students want.

Collaborating for Change

We had a year of workshops in which we discovered the main issues for staff. Crucially, we brought people together from across the whole organisation instead of doing the developmental planning in siloes where people tend to be more defensive of their patch. That allowed people to see the end-to-end process and work together in an agile way.

Members of the team from all levels and departments can bring something to it – it's not the most senior people who have the answers, or the most respected part of the organisation. Bringing in people from junior operational roles together with senior academics has proved very stimulating and motivating for those members of staff involved.

Regardless of the type of programme it's always important to understand change from the perspective of

those it affects. Check in with staff to see how they're responding to the change and be prepared to amend or increase communication.

Sometimes the managers delivering the change programme – for understandable reasons – want to show they're delivering, so might downplay the concerns or resistance at the levels below.

Get honest information, which might mean creating surveys, wandering around yourself, using social media or other informal networks. Relying on your project managers to report on that doesn't always give you as full a picture as you might need. ■



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Peter was appointed Vice-Chancellor of The Open University in May 2015. He also serves as Chairman of the Board for FutureLearn, a private company wholly owned by The Open University.

In Peter's previous role as Director of BBC World Service Group, his team provided trusted news to over a quarter of a billion people globally every week.

Peter has an international reputation for major digital transformation and led the transition of BBC News to become a multiplatform organisation in 2008.

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