



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

“Communicating change within the department”

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to be with you today. Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today’s event.

Today I would like to talk to you about change, specifically about communicating change and the role of a leader in such a process. I also plan to discuss the key elements of driving successful change processes.

I am sure that you are aware of Kotter’s key principles for communicating change. These include:

- Don’t underestimate the size of the communication task
- Use multiple channels of communication
- Lead by example, and
- Listen

people our business

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These principles have been critical in a number of change processes that we have undertaken at the Department of Immigration and Citizenship since I was appointed as Secretary in 2005. I'd like to discuss two of the department's considerable changes with you today.

The first of these processes were the widespread departmental reforms that I led shortly after being appointed secretary, and the second process is one that is still underway in the department known as our *Transformation*.

The reason I'd like to discuss both is because they are closely linked. The second example was built on the foundations of the first – without making the cultural and leadership capacity changes in 2005 the transformation changes would not have been possible. Importantly, the ability to communicate effectively established in the first change process was successfully utilised during the second process.

Before I discuss those change processes, let me give you a sense of the scale and breadth of what my department does.

About the department

Our job as a department is to help build our modern Australian nation – we do that through managing the movement of people in and out of our country, and through the settlement of people here for our inclusive, yet diverse society.

My department was established 66 years ago with 24 employees – six in Canberra, six in Melbourne and 12 in London.

It has now grown to a global organisation with more than 8000 people across 80 offices around the world.

In that time we have facilitated the migration of more than seven million people and the conferral of citizenship upon more than four million people. Economically, our migration program has been, and continues to be, a backbone to many of our industries. But we are also a compassionate country, one that has a long tradition of accepting and resettling refugees. Since 1945 we have taken more than 700 000 refugees.

As you can imagine, we are a big, and we are very busy organisation. In the current financial year the department will administer a permanent migration program of 185 000 places, we will issue more than four million visas, facilitate at least 28 million crossings of the Australian border by passengers and crew, welcome 14 750 refugees and humanitarian entrants, and around 120 000 people who have migrated here will take the final step in their journey and become Australian citizens – that equates to over 2000 new Australians every single week!

Our department is involved with our economy, our society, and our national security. We do this through providing policy advice to our government, and providing services to our millions of clients; either directly or indirectly.

We have responsibility for key aspects of border security policy and operations, visa compliance, law enforcement functions and immigration detention. We administer policy for migration and temporary visas; refugee and humanitarian entry; for settlement; Australian citizenship; and policies to enrich our multicultural society.

Change in such a large and diverse organisation can be challenging. The only way to successfully drive change is through effective communication internally and externally.

Changes to the department in 2005

At the time of my appointment as Secretary, the department had been heavily criticised in a number of government commissioned reports. The reports recommended that significant change was required in the department.

Government had demanded it.

Early on I recognised that to implement widespread reforms in a department that had successfully delivered migration programs for 60 years was going to be a challenge.

In communicating the need for change in a range of areas across the department, it was essential that I also recognised the excellent work of the department for a number of years.

The key drivers for change were empowering people, promoting leadership, and most importantly about creating a culture of openness — a culture of communication. On this foundation future changes could be built.

There were many reforms that needed implementation – many of which would substantially change the way we operated as a department. I won't go into details of these today, but they involved widespread changes to our operational environment, our technology and systems, our leadership, and to our organisational behaviour and culture. Today I will focus on how we communicated the change to drive these processes.

A culture of communication, and the structural ability to communicate, is essential in modern leadership.

Listening

Any change that was going to occur in such an environment needed to be understood by staff. Conversely leaders within the department needed to understand the opinions of staff.

To help the leadership team to better understand the department's internal opinion I commissioned an all-staff survey.

A failure in our leadership was one of the key concerns raised by one of the reports, and was also an area of concern raised in the staff survey. Staff thought that their leaders did not provide a clear sense of direction, did not interact adequately with staff, and did not involve them in decision-making.

Leadership

It was clear that improving the department's leadership capacity would improve our ability to change. Good leaders could embrace and sell change.

Early on in the reform process I addressed all staff on a number of occasions. Commonly this was about our progress against reform.

I also held a number of meetings with our senior leaders within the department to discuss the reform and improvement agenda, and the role that senior leaders needed to play. It was their responsibility to discuss these issues with staff on a regular basis.

Unless our efforts were coordinated, we had no chance of achieving our objectives. Unless we communicated we could not progress.

I instilled a leadership model with a series of capabilities that I expected all leaders to demonstrate. These included:

Vision and meaningful direction

This required departmental leaders to provide clarity, opportunities for participation and inspiration.

Operate consistently with the things we value

As professional public servants we do, as a matter of course, adhere to the Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct. The kind of behaviours that show we are operating consistently with the things we value—leading by example, helping others understand the values and acting quickly to address behaviour that is inconsistent with those values.

Communicate constantly and meaningfully

Communication is one thing that leaders must do very well. Engaging with staff on a regular basis and ensuring that the dialogue is two-way and not just information sharing are key aspects of the leadership model.

Creating an environment for success

The behaviours under this capability are about providing understanding and support for staff so that they are able to succeed in their roles. Feedback, recognition of good outcomes, and supporting an ideas culture where staff feel supported in expressing their opinions and where supervisors listen was important.

Function as team players

Good, effective teamwork relies on trust and confidence and placing value on the skills and capabilities of others.

Persist to achieve good outcomes

Finally, sometimes leaders need to be persistent. While objectives may be clear, there can be impediments. These can be overcome by keeping perspective, being resilient and optimistic.

Planning

Discussing the changes, however, was one thing. Planning and implementing them was another. To address this we developed a departmental plan – this was the tool to help us take the business forward together.

It was important in developing this to ensure that it was relevant to each area, each office, and each staff member across the department, whether they were in our national office, a state office or at an overseas post. At once it was a departmental plan, but also an individual plan for everyone in the department.

We have since produced, and worked to, departmental annual strategic plans. In that time other departmental planning processes have been linked directly to our departmental plan. This process, a planning process, is now the norm – rather than exception.

Of course, looking to implement widespread changes which were both structural and cultural would not be able to be done without effective communication. Our change processes needed to be understood by those external to the department, but most importantly owned by our internal stakeholders. Our staff.

To do this, we needed to have effective communication tools in place.

Communication

To drive this forward I identified our internal and external communication as areas that required immediate attention and reform. To do this, as a department we set about:

- restoring relations with the media, who in many cases had lost trust in the department
- rebuilding internal morale through publicising the many things the department was doing well, using multiple channels wherever possible, and
- communicating the comprehensive business change program underway to staff, the media and other stakeholders. This meant not only leading by example, but also carefully listening to staff along the journey of change.

The strategy was to establish a capacity within the department that would address communications across the board, reconnecting with internal and external stakeholders. We knew we could not underestimate the scope of the task ahead. As a result the National Communications Branch - or NatComms as it has become known - was established to provide leadership and direction for this initiative.

The first step was to professionalise the team. We recruited qualified public affairs officers and media and broadcast staff with commercial media backgrounds to manage communications for the department. This was an important step.

We started by re-building a relationship with media and at the same time, building relations with departmental staff in Australia and overseas. With a greater emphasis on being more open in our dealings, relations with the media and stakeholders began to improve.

By early to mid-2006, the public landscape for the department had significantly changed for the better. The department had a voice both internally and externally.

What was still needed, however, was the ability for the department to show this ongoing change and improvement to staff and interested parties outside of the department, including non-government organisations, advocates, oversight agencies, other stakeholders and the media.

It's very hard to have effective external media relationships if internal communication is not also pulling the organisation together, and so we've put as much effort into our internal messaging and information sharing, as we have into our external work.

For staff to feel engaged, it's important to promote a common sense of purpose and belonging. We do this using various communication tools. For example:

- face-to-face meetings between senior leaders and staff whenever and wherever possible
- each week I write to all staff in the department. Early in my tenure as secretary this included two weekly messages. As the reform process made way for normality, my messaging has reduced to weekly messages, each Monday
- special messages to staff to discuss important issues
- management circulars to all staff to discuss senior staffing appointments and changes
- leadership messages to senior staff within the department to focus points, or issues for discussion by leader and managers with staff

- a departmental newsletter, which has recently become an online web based document
- strategic communication through posters in high visibility areas throughout the department's network
- regular video messages from myself and other senior leaders within the department discussing significant events such as the Federal Budget and tabling of our Annual Report, and
- access to senior staff through regular broadcast programs discussing issues important to staff. More recently this has taken the form of a program called *In the Hot Seat* which provides an opportunity for members of the leadership group to engage with staff on various issues and developments in the department. Each episode is based around a member of the senior staff answering questions that have been submitted by departmental staff.

These tools are not only used for ongoing communication, they are also used as drivers of change.

Of course, since 2005 the communication landscape has been changing at a rapid pace. Social media platforms have revolutionised the way in which we communicate, allowing for the widespread and constant delivery of information on an immediate basis.

As a department with a global audience, it made sense for us to venture into social media technologies to reach our massive audience.

More recently we have expanded our online communication strategy to mediums such as Flickr, Facebook and Twitter. The success of our strategy is witnessed through some of the statistics of our presence.

- Our ImmiTV YouTube has over 1300 subscribers, 152 videos available, and has almost 550 000 recorded views
- Our Flickr page has seen almost 38 000 views and possible downloads
- Our Facebook page has 5000 followers and is growing every day. It has recorded almost two million page views, and has had more than 4000 people post comments, ask questions and share information with us and other users, and
- Our Twitter account has over 2500 followers.

Our communication strategy that began with change in 2005, now not only supports our work but assists us to make further enhancements to our business.

A compelling need to change – the DIAC transformation

This brings me to my second example of change. In late 2009 my department began its *Transformation*.

Four years on from the significant reforms of 2005, it was now accepted in the department that communication was not just an add-on to our programs, but a positive and essential way of integrating and uniting the organisation, building pride in what we do and using this to get the message out to our external stakeholders and audiences. It was engrained in our culture.

Confident that we had an effective communication strategy in place, to ensure we focused on long term goals, we set about developing a strategic blueprint for the future. We used an empirical approach to planning the road ahead. We looked at where we were, what challenges lay ahead, where we wanted to be in five years and the changes we needed to make to get there.

It was an eye-opening experience.

Data shows that over the next five to ten years increasing numbers of people will travel to Australia from more high risk locations. With the ease of international travel and advances in technology, there are already increased threats of terrorism and trans-national crime, including credit, identity and document fraud and people trafficking.

With much of what the department does being centred on manual and paper-based approaches, our cost structure was relatively high. It lacked the flexibility to deal with a changing risk environment. The world is clearly rapidly changing around us, with many organisations offering 24 hour services. Consequently, client expectations about service delivery are also rapidly changing.

Change was again needed, and it is was clear that my department had to transform the way it operated. The strong capability of the department to communicate that was established in 2005 would assist senior leaders in yet again moving the transformation forward.

One of the key changes was moving from delivering our services along geographic lines to delivering our services along global management lines. Previously, our work was done on geographic lines. In particular, the work was managed almost entirely out of the department's national office in Canberra.

We focussed on the strategic changes that would realise the greatest benefit. For example, would the changes improve program integrity and border security? Would they be more efficient? Would they improve client service? And if so, by how much?

The business investment logic map and the new business operating model we developed through this process has been acclaimed by other departments as well as our overseas immigration partners. We based the transformation on three main elements:

- An organisational design that enables high performance and innovation
- Improving our organisational capabilities to foster excellence and encourage innovation
- A strategic approach to client services, visa framework design and internal business support services.

A move to a global management structure was made for the planning and delivery of many of our programs which would now be headed by global managers who were not geographically restricted and could be appointed and operate from any of our offices.

The change to global managers means that the roles are responsible for the delivery and performance of a particular visa line, regardless of where the visa application is received and processed. The change to the global manager structure was made to maximise integrity, efficiency, accountability and to improve accuracy and consistency in decision making.

By having one global manager responsible for all visas of a certain type, regardless of where the visa is processed, there are more consistent outcomes across the country and clients and migration agents are less inclined to 'shop around' for a better chance of a positive outcome. The global manager is responsible for delivery and performance within their business line.

Now, across all our business lines, we have one person responsible for global delivery and performance. This global manager model was part of a deliberate plan to break through the traditionally vertical pattern of direction and accountability in the department. The global element to these roles has built connections across the organisation where connections needed to be. It has also brought a more systemic and holistic understanding of our business lines, service channels and operational risks.

Our global managers are supported by a strong operational performance team, who assist by monitoring and managing client service performance across the organisation. Together, they have played a vital role in fostering innovation in our approach to service delivery. With global scope and visibility of offices and practices all around the world, our new structure has not only enabled the identification of innovation and excellence in service delivery, but encouraged such innovation to occur.

The transformation process I have briefly outlined shouldn't be underestimated. It was, as you can imagine, a significant change to the way we had operated for the previous 60 plus years.

It involved a significant shift in architecture. Given the size of the change, we first selectively piloted the process in various key areas of the department. The Client Services Group, is a large and diverse group and represents almost half of the department's staff and are located in offices around Australia and the world.

The department was aware that communication effectively throughout the transition was critical to the success of the change process.

I was conscious that the changes needed to be communicated well. John Kotter has identified eight reasons why major change can fail. The department was well aware of number four: ‘under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or even 1000), so use every vehicle possible to communicate it.’

The department developed a communication strategy to identify the best way to inform staff. Then, listening to John Kotter’s advice, we used (almost) every vehicle to communicate the transformation and the introduction of global managers:

- A ‘transformation website’ was created on the department’s intranet page. This website contained messages from the deputy secretary, updates on key developments and questions and answers on relevant issues.
- At critical times during the change process, email messages were sent by the lead deputy secretary to all staff in a global managers’ lines. Critical times would include when a global manager position was established and/or when a critical performance milestone was reached.
- Face to face communication occurred through visits to departmental offices in the states and territories to meet with the leadership teams. The global managers also met their staff in person, and staff had the chance to ask questions and/or raise any issues, face to face. The department also utilised a ‘Face 2 face’ medium, which was an interactive web stream program, to provide an opportunity for members of the leadership group and staff to engage and interact with each other on various issues and developments in the department.

- Human resource teams in each of the department's state and territory offices and in the national office were asked to manage staff through the change and to alleviate concerns where they arose.

At the same time were also developed and implemented of a simpler organisational structure with clearer lines of accountability. Our new structure is designed to better focus our core functions and better position us as a client service delivery organisation. We now consist of four groups, each led by a deputy secretary. These are:

- Client Services Group, which focuses on the delivery of our programs.
- Business Services Group, which supports the rest of the organisation to undertake its business
- Policy and Program Management Group, which focuses on the ongoing development and enhancement of solid government policy and programs
- Immigration Detention Services Group, which given the increasing scope and responsibility associated with this work, focuses on managing detention services.

This underscores a simple lesson—that innovation can occur at all levels of an organisation, so long as the organisation's structure allows it to be identified.

Leaders must also be flexible, open and creative in their approach to create an environment where innovation is both fostered and rewarded.

While this will always be a complex area of policy and service delivery, I am certain that the department is much better equipped now to meet the challenges brought about by the rise of people in immigration detention than it was five years ago, two years ago or even a year ago.

Remarkably, the focus on global lines and global performance has meant that despite these huge pressures, we have continued to maintain and, in many areas, improve our client service standards in other areas of the business.

Executing the department's transformation has required innovation, energy, strong leadership, effective communication and persistent focus on our long-term strategic vision. The environment in which we have sought to execute the transformation has clearly been challenging. Our positive values of teamwork, service excellence, respect, openness and commitment have formed a strong basis for us to meet these challenges.

While the transformation process is a long term strategy, the successes we have had so far are pleasing. Much of this is due to our successful management of the change process, which was allowed to be owned by staff.

Significant effort was put in to ensuring staff understood what could be confusing issues, such as the global manager roles, the reasons why they were being introduced and what impact the new structure would have on their work.

The new model, despite some initial issues, is working well and has improved the department's efficiency, consistency and accountability in the way we manage and deliver our services.

Conclusion

The principles of the examples I have discussed today are no doubt transferable to other organisational change processes. For change to be successful it must be warranted, and it must be owned by the organisation, and owned by its staff.

Key themes we have sought to focus on during change processes include listening to staff and the data, having effective leadership in place, undertaking good and regular planning processes, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, having effective communication strategies and capabilities in place.

Change can be challenging, though if communicated well it can inspire and bring together staff. In my department we've seen our staff survey results in the area of organisational pride and self-esteem improve over each period we've asked our people how they felt about the department. Hopefully this means we have got the balance right.

Thank you.