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Embedding Psychological health and wellbeing at work

A brief guide to the Psychology of Mergers

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Case study

Two higher education institutions in the same town were being required to merge together as a result of pressure politically and financially. The two institutions provided some overlap and some distinct services. They were each established at different times to achieve different purposes, and each had their own cultures and reputations. One was a considerably larger enterprise than the other, and consequently had a greater income and larger capital stock.

Staff were very reluctant to merge. They felt that merging was imposed on them, and couldn't see the sense in the proposition. All the merger meetings that were set up were poorly attended, and there seemed to be no one who could provide decent advice on what to do. Staff sickness and absence began to get even worse than normal (it was already running high and out of control), and staff were looking for jobs elsewhere.

Outcome

The level of enthusiasm for the merger was so low that merger day was put back repeatedly as the basic systems and processes were not in place. Student numbers began to fall off, as staff started to leave for pastures new. Eventually the merger took place, but the staff have yet to merge, and virtually no changes have happened to the range and level of services offered. The merger has the appearance of the old separate institutions carrying on side by side.

Brief guidance

1. Mergers normally result in 'new' organisations being created. This requires an approach that establishes Psychological health and wellbeing at work – clear purpose, flat structure, new 'rules' for the new organisation, and the training of all staff in how the 'rules' should operate in practice.
 2. Merging organisations should be provided with the opportunity of 'grieving' for the loss of the former organisations. This is an essential step for progress with a 'new' organisation to succeed.
 3. Clear communications is essential to create and maintain Psychological wellbeing - about the merger process, how the merger affects staff, and the timescales involved.
 4. As many staff as possible should be engaged with some kind of action in the merger process. Their involvement bodes well for the future of the new organisation.
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Our role

- Our 3 step programme to create and sustain Psychological health and wellbeing provides a structured approach to the creation of a new organisation.
- We provide consultancy advice on the actions to be taken, and the communication processes to adopt.
- We provide coaching for managers in the merger process, and facilitate integrating meetings of departments and services.

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