

Chapter 20

Evidence-Based Organizational Change in the UK Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

This reflective case history reflects on the experiences of a UK City Authority as it responds to the challenge of policy making for inclusive economic growth. It tells how the authority, in responding to a long-term vision, used change management processes to articulate and then implement change. The approach is characterized by the use of evidence to promote change within and between organizations. This is complemented by an adaptive strategy based on the design, development, implementation, and monitoring of interventions. Change is achieved in relatively small steps through minor innovations in practice and ongoing consideration of what works and what more can be done.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to adapt to external social or economic forces through effective internal responses is often the differentiator between success and failure in organisations. How to do so remains a subject of debate in academic and practitioner circles, but amongst the most enduring models of change Kotter's (1995, 1996) contributions stand out. His hypothesis is that eight key steps provide a platform on which change can be implemented. These cover the need to engage those involved in change by, inter alia, establishing a sense of urgency and developing a vision of what the change is about. In addition, the model provides guidance about operationalising change through such means as creating a guiding coalition. This coalition has the power, energy and influence to lead the change or empower broad-based action by involving people in the process. The need to create short-term wins is identified as an essential factor

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6155-2.ch020

in maintaining momentum to the longer- term goal (Kotter 1996). A review of the effectiveness of the model concluded that a combination of this model, with others such as emergent, contingency or choice would provide an effective mix for change (Applebaum et al., 2012).

This reflective case history focuses on the employment and workforce development policies and practices of a large local authority in the UK as it seeks to respond to an ‘inclusive growth’ agenda. Local Authorities in the UK are often amongst the largest regional employers and through their employment, procurement and services they exert considerable impact on the local population (LGG, 2011). Effectively responding to a wide range of social, political and economic demands can increase their impact. The case history is framed in classical change models such as those proposed by Kotter as well as recent developments in the role of HR professionals in leading change as articulated by Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank and Ulrich (2012). In the latter, HR professionals, as credible activists, provide expertise in the issues of people management, change agents and strategic positioners.

EVIDENCE-BASED OCD INITIATIVE

Policy Making for Inclusive Economic Growth

A key measure of success of the actions relating to growth and inclusivity on the part of the local authority would be the contribution to an economic model that creates wealth for a greater part of the population and in so doing addresses some of the concerns raised by international agencies in respect to those marginalised in a local region or area (OECD, 2008; 2015). The objective is to achieve strong returns through better governance, an engaged and productive workforce and growing consumer purchasing power. Public, private and third sector organisations have a key role to play in this process as job creators, providers of training and skills, investors in physical and knowledge-based capital and through diffusion of their products and services to a wide range of social groups. Employment is often seen as a key policy goal through sustainable, quality jobs providing sufficient income, security and opportunities for progression for all.

The case history organisation, Leeds City Council is an example of an organisation seeking to change to support inclusive growth. It is one of the largest employers in the local economy, employing over 14,000 people in more than 300 occupations serving a growing population of 800,000. Like most local authorities, it has been under intense pressure to make substantial savings year-on-year to meet national government requirements under austerity. At the same time, it is increasingly challenged to find new ways of working and to become a champion of a wider place-based development, while delivering a range of core services including education, public health and social care. Leeds City Council is part of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA), a statutory body comprising of six local authorities and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership.

What Was the Reason for the Change?

A Vision for 2030 developed by key stakeholders provides an illustration of one of many antecedents for change. The vision is that Leeds will be a city that is fair, open and welcoming; the economy will be prosperous and sustainable and all communities will be successful:

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