Change and transition: Navigating the journey

In the current climate of cuts the health service is set to undergo a major overhaul, and the school nursing role is likely to be affected. In this second article, ***Christine McLean*** *looks introduces a five step framework for overseeing transition.*

The previous article (McLean, 2011) examined the ever present changes associated with school nursing practice and the important role school nurses have to play in the developing public health and integrated working agenda outlined in government policy, for example Equity and Excellence (Department of Health (DH), 2010), *Commissioning for Sustainable Development* (NHS Improvements, 2010) and the *Quality, Innovation, Productivity and Prevention* (QIPP) agenda (DH, 2011).

It also outlined the importance of the leader/manager's role in navigating the way through change and the psychological re-adjustments required by staff during these challenging times.

This article will outline the author's five step framework for overseeing transition. This practical and proactive process combines research from the work of Bridges (2000), Fisher (2003), Campbell (2009), Pfeffer and Sutton (1999), Gladstone (2000) as well as the author's own experience in leading local and regional teams through transition and change in health and local authority environments.

As previously mentioned change and transition are separate and interrelated elements of organizational change. Change is situational and starts with a beginning, transition is psychological and starts with an ending; therefore, ensuring the strategies and plans for dealing with both elements are aligned and parallel is of utmost importance.

Transition strategies are very rarely developed separately within organizations and Bridges (2000) suggests that this is the cause of many change failures and non-sustainability as a result of 'silo' mentality.

The five step model aims to help move organizations, teams and individuals through the processes of the 'ending', the 'neutral zone' and the 'beginning'. The steps include:

- Assessment of need during the ending phase
- Implementation and assessment of ending phase interventions
- Assessment of need during the neutral zone
- Implementation and assessment of interventions during the neutral zone
- Assessment of the beginning phase and ensuring sustainability of the change.

Assessment of need during the ending phase

Change requires that someone leads, to set the direction of travel and maintain a focus on the expected outcomes. As government strategy and commissioners are very strongly focused on outcomes rather than activity or outputs, the development of a transition team to lead the organizational structure change and make sense of the outcomes and outputs debate is essential.

The responsibility of this team is to identify and assess the 'old' system, highlight what worked and showed clear outcomes, what may show outcomes with more development and what did not work or show benefits and definitely needs to stop.

This assessment of baseline activity is extremely important, as mindset movement of people during the ending and through the neutral zone will require psychological 'markers' in the form of staged achievements and stepwise information flows about what changes are happening when, and why. As Weick and Quinn (1999) pointed out, often change occurs with the context of failure of some sort, the role of the transition team in this instance is to balance these messages, and ensure that the past is marked in some way, with past achievements celebrated, clarity on why changes are needed are highlighted and learned from, as the organization moves forward.

This stage may also include a comprehensive training needs analysis for staff involved in the changes to identify fit for purpose workforce, and bring to the fore those staff that have 'hidden' talents, not currently used within their job role.

Transition readiness assessments for organizations are available and if used, should be conducted at this stage. The readiness assessments can provide the transition team with a 'temperature check' of the organization and also highlight potential areas where issues may arise thatcould jeopardize the change efforts.

Who should be included in the transition team is crucial. JISC Infonet from Northumberland University (2009) highlight that change agents generally have key characteristics:

- A sense of purpose—understanding the changes to be made and being willing to keep up the momentum for change
- Capability to act—it is essential that the transition

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- team members are senior enough to take relevant decisions on team/organizational changes, that they have a political awareness, and know the influential characters within the organization
- Sell success—ability to actively build networks and work towards finding solutions with others rather than dwelling on problems. Understanding transition and the psychological needs of the workforce and support the messages of change to be balanced and effective.
- Strategically connected—this is essential in ensuring that the transition team move in the right direction and can link strategy with operations in a meaningful way.
- Critically reflective—one of the essential roles of transition team members is to be reflective and inclusive when making decisions; learning from failure as well as success is paramount to moving organizations through the ending phase.

In bringing the transition team together it is vital that the leader ensures that all members understand clearly what the role of the team is, how they are expected to behave as members and what their particular job on the team is going to be. At this stage comprehensive plans are developed regarding how the team will communicate with the workforce and how they will use activity information to develop a picture of current ways of working, and more importantly how they will link with the change management strategy to track achievements and outcomes. The team will be responsible for carrying out the following functions, and therefore the membership should be carefully chosen

Responsibilities of the transition team

The responsabilities of the transition team include to:

- Gain commitment for the change by 'selling' why the change is needed to the workforce
- Facilitate activities in relation to gathering information on activity, outcomes and evaluation of progress
- Set up and oversee systems for monitoring the progression of transition
- Identify and consult on issues that arise within the workforce, particularly resistance and negativity
- Act as role models for the change, and take responsibility for supporting each other and other managers through the transition curve
- Gather information on, and disseminate lessons learned at each stage of the transition journey, making recommendations and ensuring action is taken on them.

With these activities in mind, one point to consider is that the team members should be connected in some way to the organizational 'grapevine', so that any emerging unhelpful messages in the form of rumours and supposition can be redirected and refined in a non-judgemental, matter of fact and timely manner.

Implementation and assessment of ending phase interventions

During this stage interventions are agreed in terms of supporting staff through the end of what was and into the neutral zone. Linking this to the transition model outlined in the previous article this stage can be increasingly worrying for staff and the 'old' ways could become rose tinted 'good old days.'

The role of the transition team is to reiterate the problem with the old ways of working, 'selling' the problem rather than the solutions at this stage and supporting the psychological break with the past organizational structure.

To ensure that the workforce is clear on what will start, stop and continue in terms of daily work is crucial. These decisions may at times be unpopular; however, reiterating the problem with the way of working, not the staff undertaking the work, is paramount to moving people forward into the neutral zone.

Tailored training programmes according to the needs assessment and small working groups designed specifically to tackle any issues arising from the transition readiness assessment may be developed at this stage. Particular attention should be paid to the training of managers and leaders in areas such as the development of structured support mechanisms and practical information on how to increase resilience in dealing with difficult behaviours and negativity.

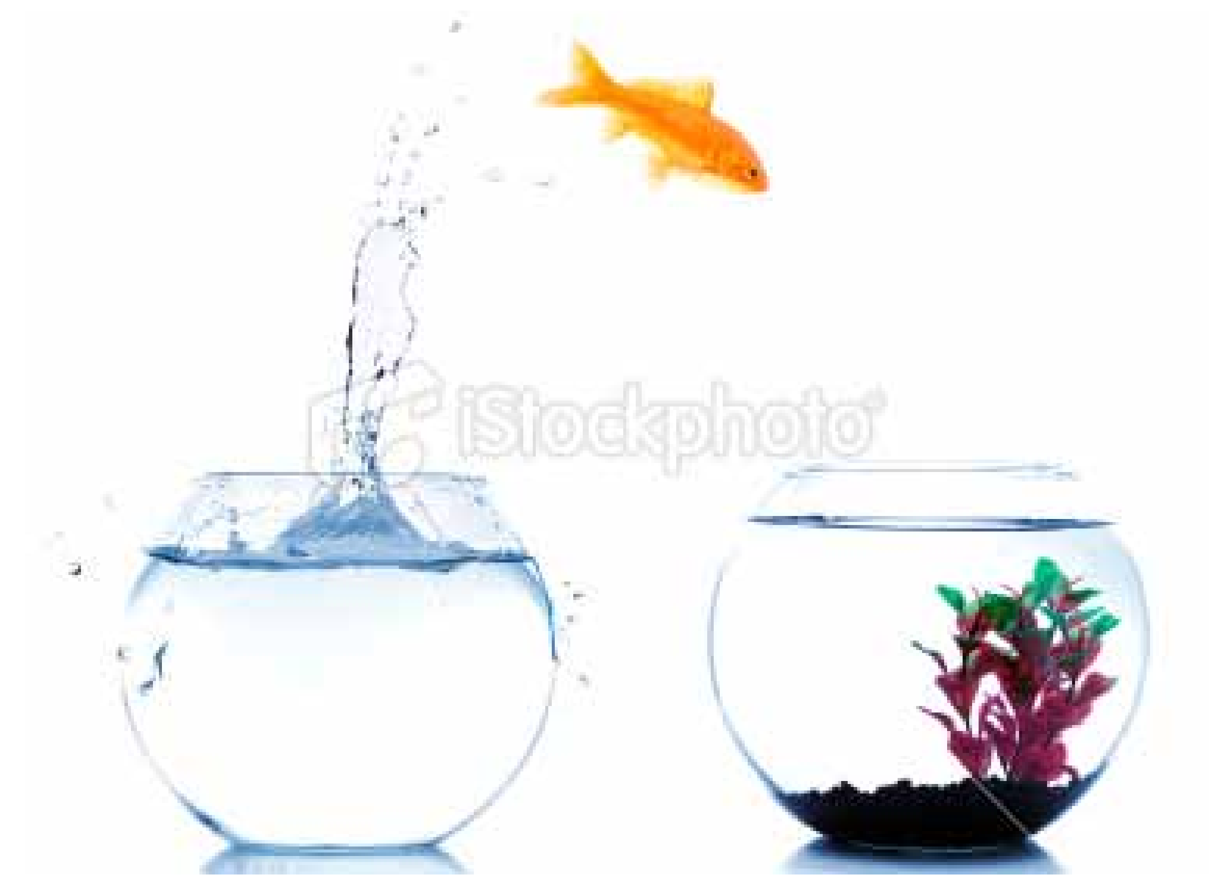
The processes of measuring and monitoring of activity and outcomes should continue apace and systems tweaked and altered according to feedback and usefulness of the data. A key action for the transition team is to ensure robust links with the change managers at all levels in the organization, so information flows more easily and can be made sense of effectively.

Also essential at this stage is reiterating the values of the organization and more importantly the transition team must ensure that communications with workforce embody those values.

Values are defined by Christensen and Overdorf (2000) as 'standards by which employees set priorities that enable them to judge whether an order is attractive or unattractive, whether a customer is more or less important' this is a critical point for the transition team when translating strategy into operational messages regarding decisions of what should stop, start and continue in the workplace. The messages should always have the 'customer' in mind and pay particular attention to highlighting the positive outcomes for children, young people and the staff themselves, while acknowledging that some of the decisions may be unpopular, they have been made for a reason and the accompanying actions required should be outlined clearly. Clarity regarding this during the ending phase is a psychological marker for staff that things are changing and this necessarily means an end. Bridges (2000) highlights that:

> **While the first task of change management is the understand the desired outcome and how to get there, the first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home'**

Assessment of need during neutral zone



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In this time of change in the NHS and more particularly the school nursing workforce, ensuring sustainability of changes, and a focused intent on outcomes rather than outputs is paramount.

The neutral zone as mentioned previously, is a stage where the 'old' ways are not yet finished and the 'new' ways are not yet embedded. It is, however, a time of great innovation and opportunity. Bridges (2000) identifies that actually managing the neutral zone, rather than drifting through it is vitally important; he argues that 'it is the only way that an organization can come through change intact'.

Personal resilience levels may be low and the transition team needs to ensure particular attention is paid to this to ensure focus remains on moving forward through the transition curve. Messages about the change also need to be reinforced, why the change is required and it is important to get the framing of the 'story' of why the change is needed right. The transition team will be responsible for framing the new ways of working and the attendant letting go of old ways in a positive light; the metaphor of a 'final voyage' rather than a 'sinking ship' is crucial to moving people through the psychological readjustments required to support and move forward through the changes. Anxiety is normal and this should not be ignored, at this stage it is better for the transition team, managers and leaders to acknowledge the discomfort, yet highlight that it will be transient.

The development of interim policies and procedures to support the emerging ways of working is crucial. It may be acknowledged at this stage that the policies and/or processes will alter once the change is completed. However, to give staff the structured guidance and support they need during this time, information on which policies and/or processes should now be adhered to, and which are no longer relevant is essential. Deciding and measuring against short-term goals is also a key feature of managing the transition to help staff reorientate and re-define their roles and their perspectives as they reach agreed targets and celebrate the fact that things are moving forward.

Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) identified the knowing-doing gap, which arises during times of change, and the author suggests that this could be more prominent during the neutral zone. The knowing-doing gap can be defined as 5 thoughts that people may sometimes have during change (Pfeffer and Sutton, 1999):

- Thinking that knowing is sufficient for success
- Thinking that talking is action
- Thinking that measuring things is action and therefore contributes to performance
- Thinking that making a decision is taking action
- Thinking that planning is the same as action.

When things are uncertain in the neutral zone, people can believe that they are taking enough action by, for example, having a meeting to discuss changes or difficulties. Nevertheless, it is continuous action, however small, that keeps the momentum going. The transition team is responsible for ensuring that the difficulties expressed in the neutral zone are acknowledged but not dwelt upon. They need to ensure that enough action is taken when issues arise and guard against their own feelings and thoughts about having difficult conversations, and support managers and leaders to do the same with their staff.

The team must also make way for people to express their ideas and thoughts about how change could be developed and moved forward. The simplest and the best ideas often come from operational level.

Increased information on early improvements and indications of good outcomes is important as people again are looking for 'markers in the sand' to show advancement. The transition team are responsible for ensuring that meaningful data is fed back to the staff to support the change efforts, the information gathering and feedback cycle should be continuous and informative at a practical as well as strategic level throughout the organization.

The tipping point is reached when a critical mass of people in the organization have adopted the new ways of working so that the rate of people changing their current ways of working occurs faster and faster. The tipping point (Gladstone, 2000) may well appear during the neutral zone and should be monopolized fully by the transition team. This is where members of the transition team and their knowledge of thought leaders or influencers within teams comes to the fore. Gladstone (2000) states that 'in a given system or process, some people matter more than others'. he maintains that this is nothing new in society, and this has been the case for centuries. However, to monopolize on this, the transition team need to ensure they engage with the 'popular' people in teams, the ones that others look to for advice and guidance, and ensure that they have them 'onboard' with plans and actions at a very early stage.

Implementation and assessment of interventions during the neutral zone

At this stage coaching and mentoring for staff is useful in supporting individual exploration of the changes and the alterations in thinking processes and perspectives required to move forward through the neutral zone. Managers and leaders training on increasing their own and their teams' resilience is also very useful to ensure that they remain robust from a psychological perspective and keep focused on the task in hand rather than become distracted by worry or stress of the changes.

Interventions must be monitored for impact on the changing mood of the workforce. At this stage a robust behavioural competency framework is extremely useful. The framework will outline what the expected behaviours are of people at all levels throughout the organization, and contribute to the development of an effective culture to support the new organizational structure. This is particularly important as Bridges (2000) identifies that during the neutral zone old habits that were unhelpful before, could rise again and cause great disruption. Building the competencies into PDR, recruitment and selection processes and training programmes embeds expectations. Being clear about what is expected from staff, and the transition team role modelling these behaviours will also support the development of the 'tipping point'.

Regular written and verbal reports on progress, productivity and outcomes are necessary during the neutral zone. This again helps the workforce understand the journey they are travelling with the change, and the progress they are making. The transition team are responsible for feeding this information back, making recommendations, celebrating achievements and ensuring action is taken on areas that are not working as well as expected. A key point to keep in mind when communicating with staff is that if the messages do not seem to be 'getting through' as leaders would wish, the way the messages are given needs to change; because repeating the same communication, with the same method that has not previously worked and expecting a different outcome will simply waste time, and increase frustration within the workforce and for leaders or managers.

Increasing effective communication and 'good news' stories, is important during this stage when energy can be lacking. Publishing of regular transition newsletters, innovation problem solving meetings with staff are all effective ways of engaging the workforce at all levels with the vision of the new organization and its progress towards achieving this.

Having an understanding of the thinking-doing gap, the transition team should also ensure that they check themselves as well as teams, to ensure they are as effective as possible in taking action as well as discussing and agreeing it.

Assessment of the beginning phase and ensuring sustainability of the change

As highlighted in the previous article the beginning phase occurs when energy is released by the workforce into new ways of working. Messages should be continued at this stage as to why the changes were implemented and the successes of the new ways of working, as well as learning from the transition journey are all keys to ensuing that the beginning does not flounder.

At this point the transition team may start to feel that their work is done; the changes are implemented and the new policies and procedures are agreed and commenced. However, the important point of maintaining the transition team for at least 4 to 6 months after the changes have been made is to monitor progress and ensure that the outcomes agreed at the commencement of the project are sustainable, and that the psychological readjustment of staff has been completed.

As previously mentioned sustaining new business cycles means that information must be continuously gathered which is meaningful and related to outcomes, it is also crucial that the data can be easily accessed and related to by the workforce to show progress and learning from what goes well and also what does not, during change. At this stage the transition team's role is to increase the understanding of the workforce regarding the data, outcomes and outputs, this stage is about renewal but also about moving the control of the 'reins' to the workforce leaders rather than the discreet transition team. For example, data on health needs assessment in schools is of paramount importance in designing appropriate interventions to meet needs. However, once the interventions are in place, continuous gathering of effectiveness data is essential to ensure that the new ways do not become a mirror image of the old ways, merely making surface changes, which will revert once the 'dust has settled' on change. The information gathered must be related to people's roles and to the expected outcomes for young people in a way that the staff themselves can see if their work is making a difference or not to the target population; what is working and to what extent, and what needs to be changed to achieve outcomes more effectively.

The transition team need to ensure a mechanism for feedback on data is created from themselves to the front line and vice versa, keeping people 'in the loop' with progress and increasing accountability for achievement of agreed outcomes at all organizational levels.

Managers and leaders again need increased support to ensure that the new beginning does not falter and action learning sets attended by peers from other organizations or teams is a useful way of providing challenge in a supportive, learning environment.

Team members would also benefit from coaching if necessary, and also a continuation of innovations workshops to problem solve any emerging issues, and newsletters to allay any developing fears that may start to re-emerge as the new beginning takes shape in the hearts and minds of staff.

Any new policies and procedures should be agreed and implemented and a monitoring of adherence to these is important to ensure people again have concrete psychological markers of change. If policies and procedures are not being adhered to, again there should be a timely and non-judgemental investigation by the transition team into why the policies/procedures are not being followed; the emphasis should be on understanding as something may have been overlooked that can enhance the new beginning if discussed openly and honestly.

As the new beginning takes shape the transition team's role as a discrete entity declines as identified operational and strategic leads take up the reins. An agreement should be made that the team can reform quickly if necessary should the change appear to falter. However, a planned, phased reduction in their role alongside a planned, structured increased engagement of the workforce is the key to sustainability

Conclusion

Transition and change are interrelated and ultimately separate processes. The author would suggest that only when transition is given as much credence in organizations in terms of planning as change management, that long-term sustainability of any change programme has a greater chance of being achieved.

The instigation of a well connected and action orientated transition team is the key to measuring and monitoring the psychological readjustment process for staff. In this time of change in the NHS and more particularly the school nursing workforce, ensuring sustainability of changes, and a focused intent on outcomes rather than outputs is paramount. This will a require a shifting of mindsets for some, and at the least altered perspectives on measurement of progress for the majority of the workforce, having a team of people to help, support, and structure the way through the transition curve is extremely important to not only help people through change, but to properly engage them in the development of new ways of working, and to ensure the sustainability of a new beginning for the delivery of school nursing services in the UK. **BJSN**

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The first article published in the previous issue of the journal looked at the concepts of change and transition during organizational and/or team restructuring.

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Key Points

- Transition should be managed as a separate and interrelated process to change.
- The transition team needs to be connected to the organizational 'grapevine'.
- Transition team members should be clear about their role during the change.
- The transition team should be mainained as a discreet group for up to 6 months after the change to ensure sustainability of systems and processes to measure outcomes.