

EPILOGUE

Transition Monitoring Team (November 1995 - January 1998)

1 Introduction

One of the initiatives of the transition managers guiding the restructuring that resulted from the service company review, was the establishment of a Transition Monitoring Team.

In January 1998 Shell Chemicals became a global organisation as a next stage in the transformation process. The Transition Monitoring Team found this an appropriate moment to review the past period and, pending a new definition of its role, present a few lessons learned.

2 Transition Monitoring Team

A Transition Monitoring Team (TMT) is a group of 7-12 people, chosen from as wide a cross section of the organisation as possible. It meets regularly to take the pulse of the organisation in transition. A TMT has no decision making power and is not intended to suggest courses of action. Its purpose is to facilitate upwards communication and to do three other things:

- The TMT demonstrates that the organisation want to know how things are going for people,
- The TMT is a focus group to review plans for communication before they are announced,
- The TMT provides a point of ready access to the organisation's grapevine and so can be used to correct misinformation and counter rumours.

(After William Bridges, "Managing transitions".)

In the kick-off meeting the above was agreed and in addition the TMT would specifically help in analysing the strengths and weaknesses of initiatives undertaken by the transition managers.

The group thereafter met regularly, synchronised by specific events, to formulate its findings to the transition managers. Each meeting was attended by one of the transition managers (later on by one of the Involvement Team members).

During a meeting, all members presented their remarks and observations in turn. Each remark was briefly discussed and when needed reformulated. When one of the remarks was felt more general it was recorded under one of the headings: Communication, Motivation, Leadership/Organisation, Uncertainty, Bureaucracy and later also Globalisation. This formed the summary of the meeting. All other remarks were listed as such. The summary and the list with remarks formed the report to the transition managers. A scheme showing these activities is appended.

3 Learning points for TMT members

- Agree, in an early stage, preferably in the terms of reference, whether TMT members play an active role in gathering information, act as a fly on the wall or are given a 'catalyst' role.
- Try to imagine whether an individual complaint says something about a larger group. If not, do not present the remark in the report as it will skew the overall picture.
- Give feedback to those who ask for it and take the time to explain.
- Do not amplify (negative or positive) news or issues. Try to stay neutral and keep to facts.
- Try to get a well spread number of opinions. Specially in small groups the opinion of a nagging individual can have a great influence.

- Tell people to go to their line manager with an individual complaint. Otherwise this will give unnecessary discussions in the TMT and onwards.
- The TMT output should be such that it enables readers to act upon.
- Report to a specific person (team), but assume the report will (eventually) be read by all staff! Avoid remarks that are traceable to individuals or teams.

4 Suggestions for transition managers

- Communication is needed to get involvement; motivation, participation and finally success.
- Do not overload people with information: Give a concise message and allow those interested to find details elsewhere (the web is ideal for that).
- Give people information as early as possible. Not when everything is decided and finished.
- Observe rules for good communication. Be consistent and clear: Who is the sender? Who is the receiver? What is the message? What is the purpose of this message?
- Do not fool people. Do not play a role as people will see through it. Admit if you are not sure or disagree with something.
- Watch out with abbreviations and jargon!!! Do not add more TLA's.
- Measure the response on communication. Through the TMT, but also listen to other channels of communication, as the line, "klankbords" (sounding-boards) and talks with staff.
- Act whenever a communication seems to have gone wrong.
- Show to staff what is being done with concerns that are voiced.

5 And finally...

The TMT members all feel that they have contributed to the communication between staff and (transition) management. The final advice given:

- When in the position to guide a transition: Seriously consider a Transition Monitoring Team.
- When asked to contribute to a Transition Monitoring Team: Do so!

The TMT:

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