



National Workforce Project February 2009

Summary of Round One Data (of three rounds) from the Most Significant Change Technique

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Introduction

The NDS Workforce Project involves:

1. The collection of data on workforce indicators.
2. Review of research on labour market trends.
3. The conduct of small, locally-based pilots that trial strategies aimed at attracting & keeping staff.

This paper summarizes data collected in the second half of 2008 using the Most Significant Change technique with 13 sites that trialled selected staff attraction and retention strategies.

Methodology

The participants were volunteers from thirteen pilot sites drawn from every state and territory. Personnel from 12 of the sites had participated in a workshop in which they:

- Identified their key workforce issues.
- Decided on strategies to address them.
- Wrote their reasons for selecting these strategies.
- Discussed the assumptions (and language) on which the strategies were based.
- Decided how to measure the impact of these strategies.
- Wrote a brief 'Project Plan' (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the Project Plan template and Appendix 2 for a summary of the 13 projects). In the months that followed, personnel were provided ongoing support on request.

While each site was free to select ways of measuring the impact of their strategies, one uniform, externally-supported measure was used at all sites — the Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique. MSC usually involves the collection of significant change stories about a program from the field; the selection of stories by designated stakeholders; and the interpretation of these stories to determine the impact of the program (Davies & Dart, 2005).

In this Project, the MSC stories are collected on three occasions over approximately 12 months, with trained project staff collecting the stories either in person or by telephone. The general strategy was one in which a project officer prompted the telling of the individual stories with specific questions such as:

- What is the most significant change resulting from the trial so far?
- Why is it significant?
- What lessons have been learned so far?
- What are the implications of the results so far?

Each story was recorded (with permission), transcribed, checked by the story-teller and subsequently analysed by the Project Team. Appendix 3 describes the Round One procedure in more detail.

Data analysis

The Project Team adopted rigorous procedures in order to ensure the credibility of the results. The MSC data were analysed in the following way:

1. Transcripts were analysed by pairs working together on half the transcripts.
2. After three transcripts were analysed by each pair, the emerging themes were shared among the group.
3. The themes already proposed independently by the Project Manager were then considered and included where appropriate.
4. The remaining transcripts were then analysed using the identified themes.
5. The participants were asked to edit their work sheets (following the meeting), identify any additional themes and to send their edited work sheets to the Project Officer.
6. These worksheets were further analysed by the Project Officer and consultant to produce a summary of frequently occurring themes across the projects at the Round One stage.

Results (frequently occurring themes across the projects at the Round One stage)

Positive effects of being involved in a national project

Many interviewees reported positive benefits of their being involved in this national project. These included enthusiasm, increased awareness of attraction and retention issues and feeling empowered because they were being encouraged and supported to work with others to address a difficult problem.

Importance of data

A recurring observation was that initial impressions, assumptions and expectations were sometimes found to be at odds with the data. Often this realisation led interviewees to a new realisation of the need for good data on which to base, and test, attraction and retention strategies.

Making changes along the way

It was frequently observed that plans needed to be refined or changed in response to initial results. The trialling of strategies and collection of data about their effects led many participants to reject or revise their initial assumptions and the strategies based on them.

Time, effort and thought

A frequent observation was that it takes time, effort and thought to conceive, implement and test staff retention and attraction strategies. Typically this observation was not accompanied by disappointment but by a realisation that the issue is complex and that simplistic solutions will not be effective. Many interviewees noted the need to be more creative and analytical about staffing issues and several mentioned the importance of being sensitive to local issues, conditions and factors.

People, relationships and caring

Across the many different sites it was evident that improving staff attraction and retention cannot be mechanical or formulaic, that it's not all about money and that the organisation's values are important factors in staff attraction and recruitment. Those who choose to work with people with disabilities value the human and personal dimensions and rewards of work.

Change is needed but it must be managed

Many interviewees mentioned that innovative solutions are necessary as existing recruitment strategies are not particularly effective. In this connection, many

mentioned the importance of enlisting staff support, canvassing their ideas and involving existing workers.

Increased understanding

In many sites, the systematic trailing of particular strategies and the collection of relevant data heightened awareness of intended and unintended outcomes. Many interviewees commented on their growing realisation that 'It's more complicated than I first thought'.

Conclusion

The enthusiastic, perceptive and honest involvement of participants on the outcomes of their trials demonstrated a very professional approach to workforce issues affecting the sector. A particularly positive outcome was the near universal acknowledgement of how important it is to test one's assumptions and to carefully evaluate the effectiveness of strategies that, in theory, 'should work', but in practice, may not. The results of Round One of the Most Significant Change technique indicate that the participants appreciated the need for 'hard data' in assessing the efficacy of attraction and retention strategies.

References

Davies, R. and Dart, J. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' technique: A guide to its use. Retrieved 9 October 2007 <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

Appendix 1
Project Plan for your Pilot Project

Please complete this Project Plan **before** you start your project. If you need assistance, contact your Project Officer or Tony Shaddock on 0438414615 or Tony.shaddock@canberra.edu.au

Organisation:

Location:

Project Officer:

Working title of project	
Who are the key people – staff and others - we will involve in this project	
What are the key workforce issues we will address?	
What are our assumptions?	
What strategies will we trial? (Describe and list)	
Why have we chosen <i>each</i> of these strategies?	
What will we actually do to implement <i>each</i> of these strategies?	
How will we engage people in this work over the next twelve months?	
What are the risks associated with trialling <i>each</i> of these recruitment and retention strategies?	
What are the potential benefits of trialing these strategies?	
How will we measure the impact of <i>each</i> of these strategies?	
How are we triangulating the data (e.g. collecting data in different ways on the same strategy)?	
What support for the work have we negotiated with the NDS project team?	
What other support or resources will we need to make this work a success?	

Appendix 2

Pilot Sites – Targeted Issues & Strategies (Indicative only)

Workforce Issues Targeted	Strategies
<p>Lower Great Southern Community Living Association – Albany WA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low profile of organisation • Low value status of work • Lack of clarity around co-coordinators roles • Retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain funds to market organisation. • Increase quality of supervision. • Redesign co-coordinator role. • Improve relationship with TAFE to increase quality of training.
<p>Bedford Industries – Melrose Park SA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty attracting and retaining staff in regional areas. • Lack of understanding of regional demographics, competencies held and drivers of the workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data gathering and analysis • Job redesign in response to data/trends identified • Targeted marketing campaign
<p>Karingal Society – Belmont VIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement and retention of workers in in-home support services. • Support and development – in-home support workers. • Broaden age profile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing employee support groups, incorporating professional development and support. • Offer greater work life balance on an individual basis through more flexible working arrangements. • Facilitate placement of VCAL students in disability work. • Liaise with local job network to ensure better match of candidates to jobs.
<p>Valmar Support Services – Tumut NSW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden age profile and gender profile of workforce targeting young people still at school to consider work in disabilities as a career choice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend enterprise agreement to accommodate both mature age and school-based traineeships. • Liaise with NSW TAFE, Board of Studies and VET in Schools directorate to develop school-based traineeship in Disabilities (that is currently not in existence in NSW). • Produce a recruitment DVD giving a true view of disability support work and the opportunities it presents, interviewing both male and female support staff & Coordinators. • Establish partnerships with local schools and RTO's. • Commence recruitment program in

	local schools with information sessions.
<p>Optia Inc – Sth Hobart TAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for greater career opportunities for support workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New job design.
<p>Somerville Community Services – Darwin NT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention • Need for Client Brokerage Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate current family friendly workplace strategy in context of turnover. • Establish partnership with Charles Darwin University to strengthen outcomes from training. • Job redesign to accommodate brokerage. • Review of job design and working arrangements to accommodate international students able to work 20hrs per week.
<p>Nulsen Haven Association – Cannington WA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention • Work satisfaction • Positive workplace culture • Need for responsive, well targeted training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce more variety into jobs. • Redevelop induction training and support processes. • Review and improve staff recognition processes. • Collaborate with local TAFE and support testing of training program by a range of NGO's.
<p>Keppel Community Care – Emu Park QLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention 50 – 60% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a collective agreement to give staff more control over roster planning and day to day decision making. • Greater surety in hours.
<p>Interaction Disability Services – Castle Hill NSW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to increase pool of mature part time and casual workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted marketing campaign. • Revise/rework job descriptions. • Establish processes for recruitment that include information sessions, job trial and ongoing contact.
<p>Yooralla Society – Melbourne VIC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job redesign – consult and rework position descriptions.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance and retention of supervisors and support staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill development to support changes.
<p>Oakdale Services – Hobart TAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for client / lifestyle driven rostering system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore rostering system options. • Consult with stakeholders and conduct financial modeling on rostering system options. • Trial rostering system(s) with broad range of local stakeholders.
<p>Koomarri – Canberra ACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase value from training. • Attraction and retention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job redesign. • Strengthen induction training. • Use relationship mapping for supporting career path implementation and succession planning.
<p>Barkuma Inc – Adelaide SA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening and retaining managers to support organisational growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job role review and redesign. • Development of leadership program.

Appendix 3: Most Significant Change Technique: Directions for Interviewers

Points for the explanation to participants

- Thanks for time.
- Remind them about the NDS Workforce Project and the pilots that involve trialing selected attraction and retention strategies.
- In the next approximately half an hour, could you tell me your story about what has happened so far in your project and in particular, about any changes you think are significant?
- I and other members of the Project Team will be using Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology as a way of collecting information about all of the pilots.
- MSC involves Project Team members having an informal conversation with participants in each pilot about 3 or 4 times over the next year and asking them to tell the story of what is happening in their project with a particular focus on what they see as ‘significant changes’.
- The MSC data will complement the data that each pilot site collects
- At Twin Waters in May, Tony Shaddock described MSC this way - MSC involves the collection of significant change *stories* about a program from the field; and maybe, the *selection* of stories by designated *stakeholders*; and maybe, the *interpretation* of these stories to determine the *impact* of the program. See Davies & Dart (2005), available at <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>.

Possible format for each interview/story

1. Clarification of confidentiality
 - May I share your story with others, e.g. on the NDS website? Yes No
 - Are there any restrictions on sharing, e.g. organisation or personnels’ names not to be mentioned? Yes No. Please specify

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2. Is it OK with you if I take notes/record your story?
3. Name of story teller(s) – see 2 above
4. Name of recorder (you)
5. Pilot site location
6. Date
7. The story
 - How are you involved in the pilot?
 - Looking back over the last three months (or since the last time we discussed your pilot) what significant changes have occurred in your pilot?
 - Of all the changes, what were the most significant?
 - What makes this particular change most significant for you?
 - What effects do you think the strategies you are trialing are having?
 - What lessons have you learned so far from the pilot about the retention and attraction of staff?
 - If there have been any unexpected changes, could you tell me about them?

- If you were giving the story you have just told a title, what would it be? Or if your story was a newspaper article, what would be the headline?
- What makes you give it that title/headline?
- When I write up this story may I email it to you so that you can make any changes?
- Thanks.