



**National Disability Services**

## **National Workforce Project May 2009**

# **Summary of Round Three Data (of three rounds) from the Most Significant Change Technique**

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## Introduction

The NDS Project involved:

1. the collection of data on workforce indicators;
2. a review of research on labour market trends; and
3. the conduct of small, locally-based pilots that trial strategies aimed at attracting and keeping staff.

Two previous papers have described the general methodology, the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique and the findings from Rounds One and Two (Shaddock, Jones, Rose, Becker, Harwood, Sampson and Speake, 2009; and Shaddock, Jones, Becker & Harwood, 2009). In summarising this *Third Round* of MSC data (collected in 2009) the current paper provides a further progress report on the progress of the trials.

## Methodology

Three experienced interviewers collected the MSC data using the following stimulus questions in face-to-face or phone interviews that took approximately 20 – 30 minutes:

- Can you give me a brief narrative /summary about what has been happening over the last three months?
- Overall, in the past year what have been the most significant changes as a result of your project?
- What data/evidence allows you to conclude that this is the most significant change?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

## Data analysis

The Round Three MSC data was analysed in the following way:

The three first authors independently studied the thirteen transcripts and compiled a list of potential themes arising from the data from all projects. Fourteen common themes were identified. Discussion and clarification resulted in a final list of ten agreed themes.

## Results

As expected, there was a degree of overlap between Rounds 1, 2 and 3 themes. For example, respondents in Round 3 again raised issues that reflected the following themes from Rounds 1 and 2:

- Involvement in a national project has positive spin-offs.
- It is important to test one's assumptions with reference to data because sometimes what we think *should* happen, does not happen at all.
- Projects develop and change over time and even positive change can be threatening.
- Projects take time, effort and thought.
- Many believe that attraction and retention are directly impacted by relationships, organisational culture and management support for staff

- Even when it is agreed that change is needed it still needs to be managed.
- Use of data leads to increased understanding and awareness of positive and negative outcomes of strategies and the complexity of workforce issues.
- Improving attraction and retention strategies is an ongoing activity.
- The economic downturn presents threats and opportunities
- It is hard to demonstrate the impact of some attraction and retention strategies in a one-year project
- Some attraction and retention strategies have unintended effects
- Many successful attraction strategies involve finding new sources of employees and illustrate win-win solutions for organisations, communities and individuals
- More collaboration and networking among organisations are needed if solutions are to be found to workforce challenges

The ten additional themes that were derived from the Round Three MSC are briefly illustrated with direct quotes from the transcripts.

## 1. STAFF CONSULTATION INVOLVEMENT & ENGAGEMENT

This theme focused on the ways staff were positively involved; had the opportunity to contribute; provided input and feedback to management; and the perceived impact of their involvement on worker satisfaction.

*... I tried to close one of the groups the other day, and they didn't move... they actually sat there and said we don't want to stop getting together.... So we decided they'd do it once a quarter.*

*I guess from a learning and development perspective I suppose the other thing that has been highlighted for us is that the team leaders and the area managers, really need some further development in terms of their managing people skills, you know that whole giving and receiving feedback, the courageous conversations, ...coaching their employees and those people management type skills. I mean we knew that that was there but it's really highlighted it.*

*...we'll have the first set of performance appraisals through for managers which will look at how the senior managers are providing feedback in relation to the social skills, as well as their technical management skills. So the processes are all in place now and they've been designed and they're starting to roll out, to capture that data. Once the data comes back to me I'll be in a position to analyse that.*

*That's probably the first time we've ever done the staff satisfaction survey. We've done staff surveys previously around training but not so much about the organisation and about immediate supervisors, workplace health and safety, you know, training and self development and those sort of areas.....*

*Ok, just for instance one of the questions was what suggestions would make your co-ordinator more effective in managing you and others. Now some of the comments [were]... “recognition of input plus new ideas from any staff member. Listen to support workers grievances, formal recognition of exceptional work incidents and actions.”*

*...so that’s been really good running that little questionnaire because they (staff) all had a feel about what community access might be and, or... what community access was with the senior support officer but also they were able to provide me with ideas for us to investigate.*

## **2. SUPERVISION AS A RECIPROCAL PROCESS**

This theme focused on the ways supervision is reciprocal and staff had the opportunity to provide feedback to management during the supervision process, both individually and in groups, making staff feel more valued in their workplace and improving their participation in professional and personal development.

*... since the pilot has been put in... is the opportunity for employees to give feedback to their manager in terms of how they feel they’ve been supported and developed to achieve their performance objective. ..it’s all very well for a performance report about the people who are reporting to us but then having accountability back the other way, I think that’s a really important piece.*

*... the most significant change for us is on that organisational level, is really shown the value of looking at setting aside the time (for supervision in groups)..... instead of being around the whole function of supervision, it’s more an indirect form of supervision .. because it’s more a group catch up .. so you can cover the issues you might want .. but you’re not going through that formal tick the box... The group supervision models worked really well..... Dialogue about role and function... has been a real beneficial thing for the co-ordinators and the PSWs to discuss.*

## **3. RELATIONSHIPS**

This theme highlighted benefits of collaborating with other agencies and forming new relationships, particularly around the attraction of staff.

*That there are people that want to help our organisation, especially with the strengthening relationships; there are other organisations out there who want a partnership with us. And basically a significant change is that we’ve blown away a lot of our assumptions that we initially had...*

*I’ve touched on it partly, I guess there’s an increased recognition of the need for services to work together and share resources to most effectively use the limited funds they’ve got... and again we touched on that briefly and when we were talking about the pooling of resources where people are sort of working two or three organisations.*

#### 4. Vocational, Education and Training

This theme related to the many advantages of a closer working relationship with VET

*... developing a relationship with TAFE or an RTO is very important ... they're in a place where they want to get our business but we also need to make sure that the training they provide is relevant to how we deliver our work.*

*...it was a big win for us to be able to create a Certificate III in Disability Work and that's a big win for the sector as a whole.*

*... but also I think the fact that we are opening disability work as a possible career option to students is also another big thing and that will obviously have a flow on effect with our recruitment activity.*

*... one day a month (TAFE) come and work with us.... and work quite closely with the training department. We assess the modules and I suppose the components that we cover in induction. Because what we're trying to do across the board here....is centralise what is actually taught at induction as a standard. So what that basically means is that we are going to have three other companies, who are going to be teaching exactly what we are going to be teaching. So if we get somebody to go through our induction process then at least that person will be able to go on to work for another agency, so sharing of the candidates so to speak, and we know that person is going to be competent. ... So going to try and work some industry standards and I suppose the charter if you want to think of it that way? And say what the guidelines are if we were to train and recruit someone, and how that person could be employable across the sector and not just for our association. So I think that is a very positive thing that we're working with TAFE and also getting together with the CEOs are getting together across the board.*

#### 5. ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

This theme dealt with the way the economic downturn has affected the projects and attraction and retention more generally. No reference was made in this Round (3) to the need to capitalise on the downturn to focus on improving attraction and retention.

*..we are going to continue to struggle albeit that it's evident that we are going into a period of higher levels of unemployment but people still have to be prepared to do the work for the level of remuneration that we can provide.*

*what I'm hearing from other organisations in the area as well as from the service managers and co-ordinators from our organisation is that last year when we were advertising for positions we might get five or six applications. We're getting anywhere from 20 to 40 ....So it is very interesting, I think the economic downturn is certainly, probably in our favour...In that people are looking for work and we are getting some very dedicated staff.*

*...but makes a lot of sense is that even though we've got a lot of applications and people looking for work, when we're actually employing them, you know, we've got to make sure we're employing them that they're actually going to stay long term and that when the economy turns up again, that they're not*

*just going to go and take all their training and knowledge with them and experience. So picking people that are going to stay.*

*... we seem to be attracting a better calibre of people at the moment, and whether that's from the project or, the kind of economic crisis we're in, we're not quite sure, but... Yeah. We've increased the range of training that we've provided, and the sort of supervision and support that the support workers are getting,*

## **6. EMBEDDING ATTENTION TO JOB DESIGN, INCLUDING MULTIPLE CAREER PATHWAYS, INTO ORGANISATION PROCESSES**

This theme summarised the benefits of giving ongoing attention to job design and job refinement, and included the desirability of providing more options for career progression, particularly for those not seeking managerial positions.

*They've actually looked at the house co-ordinators which are the supervisors in each of the homes. They've redefined their roles, and they've given them new title changes. So looking at ...the scope of work into which they have been previously employed, and at the end of the day, it's really challenged them, or it will challenge them in terms of what their job has been. Given them more responsibility and fairly more career growth as well. So that's a process they're undertaking at the moment. ... has certainly changed but looking at changing their roles and what they're accountable and responsible for.*

*I think the, the key things have been... the re-design of the coordinator's role, and the success around that, that- there's definitely... some less.... there's less time spent on administrative tasks...*

*In terms of position descriptions, it's not so much the actual position description that needed reworking as it were. It's more about how you, I mean, what people do and how people do it is still the same. It's how you actually word it more so in an ad situation and more so how you talk to people about what they do in an information session. Particularly if they don't have the background. That's the critical features.*

*.... since we've been working with the advanced support staff to role model and train new staff the service delivery has increased.....by creating another career path for people, where they want to stay hands on.... They also want to have the opportunity to progress their careers. .. doing that people can actually see there is a good career progression... and that it doesn't necessarily mean that they need to be a manager. They can earn the skills to be an effective support practitioner.*

## 7. ACTION LEARNING AS PART OF ORGANIZATION PROCESSES

This theme summarised the advantages of incorporating data collection and analysis into day-to-day operations, e.g. the value of data-based planning and decision-making.

*... rather than looking at what's best for the organisation as far as skill development and which RTO we're going to use, ....(our data) also identified that within our own staff groups we have people that have individualised training needs.. They're not all suited to the one type of organisation who delivers a certain type of training so you've done a lot of work there to try to identify the needs of the staff and individualise the training based on their needs rather than what the organisation needs.*

*I think I'm really excited about finalising the data collection and actually seeing percentages and numbers and I think for me that will really test my assumptions that I've had over this period. It'll be that concrete proof and I think that will probably be one of the most exciting things for me.*

*And the coordinators will be mapping how they're spending their time, so we can actually compare that to the, we've got coordinators to map, how much time they spent on, you know, contact with the people they're supporting, contact with staff, problem solving, office-based time, so we'll actually do that again in April and compare the two, so we can see if... what we're hoping to see is, significantly reduced time spent in admin, and more time spent with, staff and the people we support, so we'll map that.*

*Just I think, that it's made us really focus on that workforce planning and, and our staff, and to view them as a, an asset and a resource and to, to have a look at how well we can support them, to stay working for the organisation because, when we really look at it, and we, we want to uphold a certain culture and values, we realised the challenge of that, when you've got such high staff turnover.*

*Management's awareness of the issues, of the potential strategies, it's more prevalent, it's more conscious. So it's been able to give us the ability to implement strategies within to our daily planning as well as future planning. We've got a process coming up for our business planning for 2009 – 2010 and we're actually looking at the retention strategies and job redesign as a key point within that planning so its there, we've raised the awareness.*

## 8. PROFILE OF THE INDUSTRY AND PARTICULAR ORGANIZATIONS

This theme focused on public perceptions of disability work and the positive views of many potential and current workers about the industry and/or particular organisations.

*We had a great response to our advertising in the local press and our promotion within schools indicates to me that we were definitely on the right track in terms of promoting disabilities as a career option and promoting our school based traineeships.... local careers advisers have reported to me that the have had a lot more enquiries about careers in disability work and it's now*

*being viewed as an appropriate placement for students which hasn't been the case in the past.*

*More importantly I think is that public perception that XXXX is not advertising every second week ... and my concern when we were advertising was the creation of that perception that 'well what's wrong with the organisation, they can't keep staff' ...*

## **9. WORKER ISSUES**

This theme summarised issues related to sources of workers for the industry, untapped employment pools and the factors that impact on workers' decision to stay in disability work.

*It's not putting something in the paper that frightens people up, off. And actually describing what the work is to people in plain English, and in information sessions. So you may see it as this, and if we told you about that and you looked at that in the paper, you'd be scared stiff. Or you'd say no I can't do that. But if we talked to you about you know, in these set of skills that you do in an every day situation, yeah, you can do that. You know you can do it, and that's fine. So that's the key.*

*I did get a lot of comments, both negative and positive. The ones that come in normally into the organisation just accept their induction, where these people, it's all new to them. So they were saying things like, oh, this is really good, it's a very unique way of recruiting people, I really like what you have done, and others were just interested, am I going to get a job out of the end of all of this information. So there was both positive and negative (comments on changes in induction processes).*

*So... and that's making quite a significant difference in how well-supported people feel when they first get here, it means they're getting the supervision that they need, and it's meaning that we're probably choosing the right people, and so there are fewer people not making the probationary period.*

## **10. PROACTIVITY**

This theme summarised the organisational benefits of implementing systematic attraction and/or retention strategies that result in a less 'crisis driven' approach to the issue.

*I've noticed ...that lack of panic advertising ... and almost a new found confidence and calmness in our processes because we can do them. We can interview and engage people and orient them at our own pace and at our convenience rather than having that crisis response all the time. ... service is not in the paper every second weekend almost begging for staff.*

*We haven't had to advertise as much and we've been having staff ready to step into the vacated roles. ... we've had one of our staff resign and she finishes next week and we'll be able to start a new casual to take her place. By then the casual will have been buddied in ... so it's working very well..... and whilst it's another aspect or an added burden if you like within the*

*management role as I've said to them in the past, you either have the choice of doing it now when we can do it with a degree of comfort and in a relaxed way as opposed to 'god we've got to buddy this person in because we need them for a shift on Sunday'.....So we can control the pace as opposed to being dictated to by circumstances.*

*It's (proactive recruitment and group information sessions) been a much, much more cost effective way of doing it (recruitment). ...we've learned a lot, we know we have to streamline the process, and we know how to do that. We now how to take into account, there is some resistance because people who run programs like to interview people they are going to put on, and so this is taking a bit of control away from them. And we've worked out how to get them involved in the process, so they know who we're putting on board.*

### **Conclusion**

The most significant changes reported in Round Three illustrate a deepened awareness of pivotal issues in the attraction and retention of staff. Several participants noted significant positive changes in relationships and/or increased awareness of the centrality of productive and harmonious relationships — with staff, colleagues, other organisations, and particularly with VET.

The Round Three themes also focused on the positive features of 'disability work' and highlighted its inherent attractiveness to many people. This in turn led some individuals to be more conscious of the profile of disability work and to market it to new sources of workers in innovative, creative and non-threatening ways.

Some participants stressed how important it is to embed the consideration of attraction, retention and job redesign within the organizational culture and operation.

Finally, many participants spoke positively about their involvement in an 'action learning' pilot that required them to think critically about their assumptions and to rely on data when evaluating the effectiveness of particular attraction and retention strategies.

### **References**

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