

MEDIA INFORMATION

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CONTACT: Simon Brian, 01664 454511

HJC Associates specialises in working with member organisations and trade associations in organisational development and delivering change. Here, managing director Helen Chambers looks at the challenges.

Why it's OK to shoot the messenger!

What often sets successful organisations, regardless of size, aside from those that struggle is their ability to embrace change and lead the way. Invariably they seek out and work with external advice.

The same is true for member organisations and trade associations. For any organisation, working with someone who is looking in from the outside will often identify challenges that might otherwise be ignored.

External support is helpful when stressful organisational change and new techniques are introduced. These changes are often perceived by staff as bad news.

But if they're sensitively delivered by an external supplier they don't become territorial or personality driven issues. They are the result of an independent assessment and in the best interests of members, staff and stakeholders.

If members of staff choose to create barriers and 'shoot the messenger' who comes bearing that message of change, it's OK because getting the task done is more important for the long term success of the organisation and those that create the barriers often respond when their concerns are genuinely addressed.

A simple business plan brings focus on where the organisation is going but it must be built on a belief that it will succeed. Too often, when asked why something is done the way that it is, a manager will respond: 'because we've always done it that way' or "there isn't another way."

Strong business planning will help an organisation define where it's heading, whether it's making appropriate decisions, and whether the action plans are robust. It will also help with workforce development, governance and addressing crises.

Just as importantly it addresses any self limiting beliefs that might exist and provide the space in which senior managers can talk through challenges. Opening up thinking is essential to successful development and change.

A recent project included two principal objectives. One was a review of the membership grades, including criteria and assessment levels, and the second was helping everyone understand what was involved in moving to charter status. Indeed this latter objective included questioning whether the organisation needed to move for charter status.

HJC Associates undertook a detailed review and audit of the organisation, examining areas such as member grades, comparable professional associations, plans for status as a Government-recognised awarding body, and the development of qualifications for addition to the National Database of Qualifications.

It also included developing criteria for aligning member grades to a training strategy and new qualifications, and developing membership assessment principles and procedures, including quality assurance.

We produced and agreed Governance changes and, where necessary, facilitated implementation and resource planning for the whole project, including transition arrangements which covered internal communications and marketing.

One of the keys to this being a successful project - and avoiding being shot as the messenger - was to ensure everyone was engaged with the process, that research was credible and relevant, and that there was wholesale acceptance that doing nothing was not an option.

Executive-led meetings and consultant-led meetings, interviews with key personnel, desk and telephone research with comparable professional organisations, facilitating project planning meetings and the production of project plans and stakeholder analysis, were all essential. It was also important to ensure everyone understood why change was necessary and how it would bring about improvement.

Change comes in two guises: one is necessary for an organisation to catch up with others in its sector or market; the second anticipates the future and those that are successful at this are called (market) leaders.

For any further information, contact:

Simon Brian
The Encore Organisation
Burrough Court
Burrough on the Hill
Melton Mowbray
Leicestershire
LE14 2QS
01664 454511
simon@encorepublicrelations.co.uk