Shifting the goalposts during the game

The changing roles of district superintendents in a state government department

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This article reports on research in a state government department of education in which a change in chief executive closely followed an earlier major departmental reform and restructuring process. As a result of a lack of discussion and communication about their future roles and contribution to the organisation, front-line leaders and managers reported role confusion. The article identifies a number of suggestions for consideration in organisations where similar changes might occur, in an attempt to avoid the difficulties as evidenced here. Effective communication between the chief executive and front-line leaders and managers regarding future intentions is central to these. The suggestions have particular significance in light of the common phenomena now in government departments whereby senior executive transition invariably occurs in response to changes in government.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the period of the late 1990s into the new millennium is an era of discontinuity and change for organisations, captured so aptly by writers such as Limerick, Cunnington and Crowther (1998) and Clarke and Clegg (1998). Successfully steering organisations through this period is a significant leadership challenge. To survive and remain competitive in this era frequently requires large-scale changes which Nadler and Tushman (1995a) see as fundamentally different from incremental change.

While leading a large, complex organisation through such change might be a major challenge for any leader, to suddenly lose that leader only six months into the reform process can seriously impact on the stability of the organisation and its various stakeholders. This impact is likely to be enhanced should a new leader from outside the organisation be appointed to replace the former leader.

This article describes how such an executive leadership transition impacted on district superintendents working in a key client interface position in a state department of

education in Australia. The transition occurred not long after a large-scale change had been initiated. The discussion focuses on how the roles of these superintendents changed in the period following the transition and how they struggled to cope with the changes. Suggestions for ways to minimise role ambiguity and role conflict resulting from such unplanned transitions are made. Essentially, the article cautions against shifting the goal-posts during the game, without first negotiating with the players. The case described is particularly relevant, given the trend in the last decade or so for the replacement of government departmental chief executives following changes of governments. The discussion draws on the leadership literature as it pertains to managing large-scale transformation in organisations, as well as a body of literature now more commonly known as 'leadership transition' (Farquhar 1995).

The article draws on research that has investigated the changing role of a level of educational administrators termed, for the purpose of this article, district superintendents, a position created to play a key role in the departmental reform process. The research data were collected some 18 months after the appointees took up their newly created position, and about a year after the change of chief executive (the Director-General). While the research reveals how the change of leadership created confusion about roles for some district superintendents, it offers hope for future management of leadership change and the ongoing involvement of these personnel as essential emissaries at the critical department-client interface. The article considers the roles and responsibilities of these key front-line leaders and managers under the leadership of the former Director-General and contrasts them with emerging roles under the leadership of the new Director-General of the restructured department. Challenges of the newly expanded role are briefly discussed.

CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

Over the past decade or so, public education in much of the developed world has been subjected to significant reforms under a devolution framework of operation, variously referred to as school- or site-based management. As a result, there has been a significant shift of responsibilities to schools and their communities (Brown 1990; Caldwell 1993; Levacic 1995). Schools have thus increasingly operated with greater autonomy, flexibility and accountability for decisions in areas such as budgeting, facilities and staffing. In almost all systems where such change has been implemented, there has been an accompanying restructuring of entire government departments of education. Such was the case in the state education system where this research was conducted.

The system-wide restructuring affected almost all those working in the department. Because of its magnitude, it could well be described as an organisational 'turnaround' (Stace and Dunphy 1996) or 're-creation' (Nadler and Tushman 1995b). In particular, in the early stages, the reform affected central and regional office personnel and services. Previous to the reform, schools had been grouped into large regional areas. These divisions were abolished and the department's schools realigned into a larger number of smaller districts. Each district now comprises about 40 schools. As part of the reform, a

district superintendent was appointed to each district with responsibility for schools in that cluster, and with a particular focus on the leadership development of principals. The district superintendent position was created specifically as part of the school-based management initiatives of the department. The personnel appointed to these positions were chosen from the ranks of former regional directors, central office and school support centre staff, and school principals.

The position of district superintendent is structurally located a level below that of Assistant Director-General, with the appointee acting as the supervisor of approximately 40 principals. It is essentially an upper-middle level leadership-management position. The roles of the district superintendent were originally delineated in a position description that indicated the essential thrust of the position was in working closely with principals in an endeavour to better prepare them for their roles and responsibilities as leaders of self-managing schools. Leadership, management and accountability were seen as major foci of the position.

The change of government saw not only a change in Minister for Education but also the replacement of a long-serving Director-General with an outsider, an executive without experience in the schooling sector. This change occurred only six months after district superintendents commenced in their newly created positions. The new Director-General was appointed about a month after the former leader left.

The reform process had been designed and led in large part by the former Director-General. Essentially, it had been his vision and energy that had driven the restructuring and transformation of the department. It was he who had appointed the thirty-six district superintendents to carry out very specific duties in guiding schools towards total site-based management. He had also been instrumental in appointing several Assistant Directors-General, all strongly loyal to the reforms of public education, to support the work of the district superintendents. As a result, the new Director-General became the leader of a government department only recently restructured, and staffed by personnel only recently recruited by his predecessor. This brought with it several challenges for the new leader, among which were the constraints of a reluctance to make any more organisational changes, in structure or personnel. However, the new Director-General, working within these constraints, did influence the work of the existing superintendents by significantly altering their roles.

THE RESEARCH

The research underpinning this article was qualitative in nature. Data were provided by in-depth interviews with eight of the 36 district superintendents. In selecting the district superintendents, attention was given to a range of characteristics, including background experience, gender, and location and characteristics of the superintendent's district so as to provide as wide a sample as possible. Participation in the study was voluntary, with all district superintendents willingly cooperating. Participants were assured that their identities, and that of their districts, would remain confidential.

The eight superintendents – five male and three female – had a variety of back-grounds and experiences. Three had previously been executive directors of regions, two assistant executive directors of regions, two principals (one secondary, one primary) and one a support centre coordinator. All had been in the department of education for long periods, with seven of the eight serving over 20 years. The superintendents represented urban, provincial and rural districts. All participants knew one of the authors of this arti-cle, thus increasing the level of trust in the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

Interviews lasted about 90 minutes each and with permission were taped. An inter-view summary was forwarded to each participant shortly after the interview to be checked for accuracy. Key quotes from the interviews were also transcribed. Interview data were analysed following procedures outlined by Marton (1988) whereby comments are brought together into categories on the basis of their *similarities* and categories being differentiated from one another in terms of their *variances*. Drafts of the research report were also sent to participants for comment towards the end of the research period. To increase validity, three other district superintendents were asked to read and provide feedback on the draft reports. Little by way of change was recommended, thus suggesting that the report represented an accurate reflection of the perceptions of district superinten-dents about their work. It should be noted that the data reflects a 'point in time' in the development of the roles of district superintendents and the influences that shaped them.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Leadership for change

Stace and Dunphy (1996) identify four types of organisational change. The most dra-matic of these is a large-scale transformation known as a 'turnaround', which they sug-gest is 'frame-breaking change' (p.96). In the same vein, Nadler and Tushman (1995) describe a similar discontinuous change that they term 're-creation' of an organisation that is significant, radical and rapid. The restructuring of the education department in this study bears many of these characteristics. Its purpose was to fundamentally change the way schools and the department itself would operate. Many department positions were significantly altered or disbanded and existing personnel transferred or required to apply for newly created positions. As part of the change process, the department rede-fined its corporate goals. Even the cultural foundations of the department were to be altered by the adoption of a new logo, a new name and a new direction. This reform was by no means an 'incremental adjustment', but a 'corporate transformation' (Stace and Dunphy 1996).

Kotter (1999, p.2) reinforces the idea that 'the basic engine that drives successful change is leadership', but the pursuit of large-scale change in an organisation requires a particular type of leadership that is different from that required for more incremental change (Nadler and Tushman 1995b). Miles (1997, p.5) emphasises that corporate trans-formations do not just happen, rather they occur because they share a few fundamental attributes:

> they thrive on energy, they are vision led, they are based on a total-system perspective, they are embedded in a comprehensive implementation process, and they demand a transformational leader.

Such was the corporate transformation of the education department under the leadership of the former Director-General. Stace and Dunphy (1996) term the successful leader in these type of turnaround situations the 'commander'. Because the goal of a turnaround is compliance with radically redefined goals and performance standards, Stace and Dunphy describe effective turnaround leaders as 'tough-minded' and 'directive', leaders who are 'prepared to take forceful measures if necessary' and operate out of a 'top-down' model (pp.155-156). Collaboration is not part of the make-up of the commander style of leadership. Research into the roles of district superintendents suggests that the former Director-General was such a leader, able to negotiate a radical new vision using strategic and structural initiatives to communicate a rationale for urgent change (Stace and Dunphy).

The role of district superintendents under the former Director-General

Stace and Dunphy (1996, p.160) suggest that if a turnaround is well planned it can have distinctive advantages for an organisation since it 'provides clear direction and leadership, redistribution of resources to the new strategic initiatives and rapid repositioning of the organization'. This captures the essence of the transformation of this department under the leadership of the former Director-General. There is strong evidence that district superintendents had clear direction and leadership at the commencement of their new employment and that the department was strongly focused and directed towards implementation of school-based management under the former Director-General's initiative.

All district superintendents interviewed agreed that their major role was in guiding principals towards better education outcomes and assisting them in progressing towards full school-based management. They regularly used terms like 'coaching' and 'mentoring' in relation to their work with principals. The original focus was almost exclusively on and with schools. District superintendents explained that under the direction of the former Director-General they were expected to spend the majority of their time in schools and conduct at least one visit to each school per term. The average time spent in schools for this sample of eight district superintendents was 80 percent:

> [The former DG] had a vision ... with schools as the focus, and the needs of the corporate sector and anybody outside of school were to be sacrificed to meet schools' needs, which is probably equally damaging ... but it had that focus. (Sandra)

> Our brief was to work explicitly and directly with principals on a singular basis. It was very much a schools focus. (John)

It is evident that the work of district superintendents was originally highly controlled, with some monitoring of their work by one of the Assistant Directors-General. The original concept of the role, which emphasised a focus on schools, was also a constrained one as the time of district superintendents in schools was to be spent working one on one

with principals. Other education stakeholders such as teachers, parent groups or princi-pals' associations were outside the operational sphere of district superintendents:

> Previously we were quite pointedly told, explicitly told, and to the point of being repri-manded if you stepped outside the boundaries, in that we would only have our con-versations with principals. There were explicit directives that we weren't to have conversations with the ... [teachers' union, P&Cs and principals' associations]. We weren't to foster, promulgate or to work with any of those interest groups. This is under the old DG. (John)

The district superintendent's role in improving the educational outcomes for students and establishing the grounds of school-based management was not to include involve-ment with facilities, staffing, ceremonial work or central office policy development. The former Director-General had been firm on this. This was part of the transformation of the department, a departure from the regional model where these issues had been the responsibility of senior regional officers:

> And the previous DG believed that our role is very much focused on student learning outcomes, making it a quality system. And that there are other parts of the organisation such as facilities services centres who would get involved in things like when buildings had to be painted and whether there are sufficient carpets on the floor and so forth, and [we were] not getting down that track. (Charles)

Before commencing in their new positions, to ensure that new district superintendents clearly understood and were skilled for their distinctive and important roles in imple-menting the new initiatives, they were provided with professional development in the form of a four-day residential course. All district superintendents spoke very highly of the professional development they received during that time. Although they formed a collegial bond during this time, formal networking between district superintendents was discouraged by the former Director-General. While meetings of the whole group were held quarterly, most district superintendents indicated that they had little real control over the agenda:

> And I think we've been so effectively put into line relationships as opposed to net-works, and I think that was actually a deliberate choice from ... [the former Director-General], to make sure that district superintendents never did become a coalition ... to keep us in our boxes ... (Carmel)

The picture painted thus far under the leadership of the former Director-General was one of a highly controlled workforce:

> I'm not sure how ... [the former Director-General] would have come down on the idea of widening the role [of district superintendents]. I believe he was intent on keeping the role quite narrow and I would agree with that. (Richard)

While commander leadership has the ability to successfully turn around an organisation, one of the negative aspects of this style of leadership is that it reduces the leadership

density of an organisation. Key figures may be instrumental in assisting the commander to communicate the change, but these personnel are often chosen specifically for a position in the top team because they are known to be loyal to the commander. With this top team the commander may act consultatively, but be much more direct with those in lower ranks (Stace and Dunphy 1996). Middle managers may find themselves without real leadership strength. Instead they operate as managers of the leader's vision, but are not included in collaborative structures.

In this case, while some district superintendents saw themselves as leaders in their districts, others acknowledged that much of the work they did was managerial, and involved ensuring that accountability requirements and performance outcomes were met. In that sense, it could be argued that they were managers of the leader's vision, not actually leaders of others, such as principals. Under the former Director-General they had almost no opportunity to become involved in big picture developments outside their district, and had limits placed on what they could do inside it. However, this changed after the leadership transition, but in a way that was not consultative or formally acknowledged.

Nadler (1995, p.221) suggests that in this kind of situation middle managers may become disenfranchised, losing their ability to lead 'because no direction, vision, exhortation, reward or punishment is meaningful unless it comes directly from the heroic leader'. A degree of dependency on a strong, visible and energetic leader may occur, where others lose the impetus to initiate actions without the leader's approval (Nadler 1995). As noted, in the government department of interest here, the research reveals that the newly appointed district superintendents were assigned very specific roles that left them with little opportunity to become involved either in the development of policy or to be able to feed back into the decision-making loop of the department.

The leadership transition period

As noted, the change of government led to a change in the most senior executive leadership of the department, only half a year after the original turnaround commenced. While it is most common for leadership transition to occur *before* the commencement of corporate restructuring (Wiersema 1995), in this case the transition occurred *after* a long-serving executive had implemented large-scale change.

It is realistic to expect a period of uncertainty during any such transition period (Theus 1995), especially as in this case where the departure of the former Director-General was largely unanticipated and unplanned. Further, it takes time for a new executive to become familiar with the operations of a new organisation. The transition period can be traumatic for some, especially when a strongly directive, transformational leader departs. As Ettorre (1996, p.14) notes:

> The naming of a new outside CEO is a moment unique in an organization's history, a time when the company is holding its breath. The new chief executive is an unknown entity. Lines of succession and the old ways of doing things are probably in jeopardy. Fear and anxiety fill the ranks.

Theus (1995) suggests that an unanticipated departure of a leader, besides increasing uncertainty for all concerned, can lead to the heightening of emotions and the destabilisation of both legitimate authority and information channels. Destabalisation of information channels can lead to a narrowing of information flow, which ultimately can cause errors in accuracy, understanding and agreement. This state creates a 'power vacuum' (p.30), with ramifications for organisations if it remains for very long. In this case, it might not have been a power vacuum, but there was certainly a hiatus period or void, described by some district superintendents as a period without apparent strong leadership and direction:

> We then went through the issue of losing ... a DG who, for better or for worse, was a populist figure, ... [long-standing] career in education, had driven the hard agendas and had bought a central office directorate with ... new district superintendents on board, basically his 'chosen'. So you have that loyalty to the leader, all the grieving, the heartache stuff that goes with it. (Alex)

> And I think a couple of the ADGs here who seemed to be very, very closely aligned with ... [the former DG] and who had been at the very, very hard end of driving 'the new agenda' all of a sudden were without a mission or even without direction. And I think to say that we were the Marie Celeste on the ocean of education for a long time would not be an understatement. Naturally, in that time, when there's vacuum other things hurt. (Alex)

Because networking with colleagues had previously been discouraged, some district superintendents felt very isolated following the change of Director-General. This isolation was increased because the Assistant Directors-General who previously supervised the work of district superintendents, were steadily given other tasks of a corporate nature that drew them away from that role:

> The ADG, by virtue of the hierarchy and bureaucracy, is being ordered by the DG to carry out a whole heap of agendas that are not schools oriented, and that's the care and control of politically hot situations, the resource levies and so forth. So it becomes standard now ... that you don't hear from your Assistant Director-General unless there's something wrong in your district. (John)

Changing roles for district superintendents under the new Director-General

'Comparisons between new leaders and their predecessors are inevitable', according to Gilmore and Ronchi (1995, p.11). Understandably, managers and other employees, as well as other stakeholders, make judgements about the differences in operating styles of leaders. The 'shadow' of a predecessor can be a challenge to overcome (Gilmore and Ronchi 1995), especially when the predecessor was long serving and well respected, as was the case of the former Director-General here.

For example, with regard to the new Director-General some district superintendents were quite uncomfortable with the fact that their new leader was unfamiliar with the culture of the organisation and had, in their view, made some public gaffs.

> At that point we had a new boy [DG], unreservedly intelligent. He has certain agendas, but he also has a degree of naivety. He doesn't know our organisation and the organisational culture. Now he's willing to learn, but he is making some terrible faux pas in the instance and he doesn't know he's making them ... he has no profile within the department. (Michael)

One constraint making the new Director-General's task particularly challenging was that he had inherited an organisational structure he was unable to easily alter because of the recent major restructuring. Any new initiatives by him, then, had to be within the constraints of both the existing departmental structure and with the existing middle personnel. However, while structural and personnel changes were not implemented, the new Director-General did effectively change the roles of the district superintendents.

A very obvious change in roles was that the new Director-General provided some new opportunities for district superintendents, opportunities to share in the bigger picture of the organisation. District superintendents were invited to become part of steering committees and task forces for strategic planning and development of policy. Around 40 such working groups existed at the central office at one point. Some district superintendents were involved in up to five of these committees, work that took them away from their previously almost singular involvement in schools:

> One significant one [change] was ... [the former Director-General] on the teleconference would say if he sees any ... [district superintendent] in central office he'd personally escort them out of the building because there are three perfectly good Assistant Director-Generals (Operations) to do their work in ... [town]. To now, where there are over 40 projects being undertaken, because that's the current way of the current CEO. (Linda)

Steadily, the nature and focus of the work of district superintendents began to change. For example there was an expectation that district superintendents would start to handle some of the facilities and staffing issues in their districts. Meetings with district stakeholder groups of teachers, parents and principals were no longer discouraged. In fact the opposite was the case, with the emphasis on being in schools working one on one with principals abating. For example, the new Director-General gave tacit approval to a reduction of the (rule-of-thumb) 80 percent in-school time by district superintendents. Some district superintendents saw this in conflict with the primary focus of their role as originally conceived:
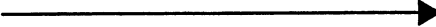
> The new DG made some statements at a meeting in April where he really was stating that he was expecting ... [us] to be change agents, to bring about change in the schools. And clearly the ADG is seeing an increased role in facilities, and there are a couple of DSs around who are spending a lot of time working on facilities issues at present. The DG also said that the 'raw', in inverted commas, 80 percent of time spent in schools could be relaxed in consultation with ADGs. Now I don't particularly want to do that. I suppose that what I'll continue to do is spend my time in schools and just extend my working week. (Richard)

Many district superintendents welcomed the additional roles (summarised in Table 1) since they felt they had a lot to offer the organisation in terms of planning and policy development, particularly as they were 'on the ground' and could readily observe how decisions made at central office were affecting those in schools. It provided them with new opportunities for involvement in the 'big picture', thus breaking the continual repetition of school visits and challenging them further than their previous roles had done:

> In the previous view, district superintendents never came into the office. They spent 90 percent of their time in the schools and basically didn't need to deal with any other policy-cum-management-cum-corporate agenda. And there's been a bit of slippage of that lately. I think a little bit of slippage is not a bad thing because at times you really can feel like one of the mushroom club. (Alex)

> So the projects [committees] will lead into the ten-year strategy and that's fine. And the DG says that there is the expertise of ... district superintendents out there that he wants to input. In fact, informally I've heard them other district superintendents say that they want to use all of their brain cells and just going into schools all day everyday is repetitive, and once you've set up the patterns and it's going well couldn't we have something more challenging? (Linda)

Table 1: Changing role focus for district superintendents

Earlier role	Current role
• coaching of principals	• coaching of principals
• accountability of principals	• accountability of principals
	• task force, committee membership
	• staffing and facilities management
	• departmental representative with stakeholders
	• 'face' of the department

Expanding role over time

The effect of changing roles

Change of any sort has the capacity to affect people in a number of ways. It has the potential to challenge competency, create confusion and cause conflict (Bolman and Deal 1997). Competencies are challenged when change causes alteration to practices, procedures and routines, in that it makes people feel insecure and doubt their own abilities (Evans 1996). Confusion is created because in a situation of change people often no longer know what their duties are or who has the authority to make decisions (Evans). The uncertainty created by an unplanned and somewhat destabilising leadership transition as here, therefore, can also have the effect of producing role conflict and role ambiguity for employees.

Role conflict, which Wagner and Hollenbeck (1995) define as 'the recognition of incompatibility or contradictory demands that face a person who occupies a role' (p.221) can occur where a new leader requests an employee to carry out tasks that are not compatible with those assigned by the predecessor. Role ambiguity can follow from role conflict since the employee will no longer be certain about their role expectations. Role overload can also occur if the employee attempts to accommodate the extra, possibly opposing, roles of the new leader into the position alongside the previously assigned roles. There is certainly evidence here to suggest that all of these are evident to some extent for district superintendents.

What contributed to the problem was that the new Director-General demonstrated little understanding of the roles and responsibilities of district superintendent as they had been under the previous Director-General; at least this was the view among many of the district superintendents. This caused some district superintendents to seek clarity on their roles. There was an element of role ambiguity, since they no longer knew what was formally expected of them 'by the system'. There was also role conflict. They could see a contradiction in the roles since committee work, facilities and staffing roles and negotiation with stakeholders would prevent them from maintaining the once close relationships with principals. Some sought formal acknowledgment that the expanded role was what was now expected of them:

> We wanted to have the changing role of the district superintendent or the evolution of the ... role [on the agenda of the meeting] and we were told that they were business meetings, and that the role was changing but we didn't want to flag it. But I said, 'But everybody out there knows that the role is changing'. (Sandra)

> One of the things we district superintendents as a group have been very keen to do is to really gain an appreciation of just what is our role and have it clearly defined. It is evolving. I think it's also open to some interpretation. (Charles)

Without an official reframing of the role, some sought to build enhanced professional networks with their colleagues. These networks also had the purpose of providing opportunities to feed their concerns and suggestions back to central office in a more formal manner, especially since the climate for doing so had improved under the direction of the new leader:

> We were all being worked in isolation if you like. So we had a teleconference and we now make it a regular fortnightly basis with the twelve of us, or those who can, hook up. And we say, 'Okay, what are the big issues that we're hearing at schools?' ... If it [some specific issue] is cropping up in three or four districts or for all of us, then it's an issue that ... [the department of education] needs to know about. (John)

While the period of leadership transition caused an apparent power vacuum or in essence a hiatus period for many district superintendents, what occurred after this has also had a major impact on these personnel. What can clearly be seen is that there has been an expansion, albeit a non-negotiated one, of the roles of district superintendents

under the new leader. Some district superintendents have mixed feelings about the new roles, especially as the new Director-General has not formally acknowledged or articulated them.

SUMMARY COMMENTS, IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In summary, the research reported here reveals that the district superintendents, as key leaders and managers in a large, complex organisation, had been recruited to play a quite specific role of developing school principals as leaders of essentially self-managing schools. Some 18 months later, the superintendents now found that their role had changed quite dramatically. That role was different from the one for which they were recruited and for which they felt themselves competent to achieve. There were now opportunities for involvement in more of the corporate business of the department, and this was welcomed by some. Others were less inclined to accept the new responsibilities, or did so unwillingly as they saw these changes as interfering with what they still saw as the real thrust of their position, that for which they were originally recruited. This has resulted in role ambiguity and role conflict for some, with most at least seeking some formal clarification of the expectations and specifications of their new roles. This research was undertaken at a point in time in the history of a state government department. Not surprisingly, then, the roles and responsibilities of the district superintendents have continued to evolve since the data for this research were collected.

A number of suggestions emerge from this study on leadership change in a government department, especially given that it has now become almost routine for chief executives to be replaced with changes in government. Chief executives, in planning their entree into new departments or organisations, would do well to consider the circumstances of their leaders and managers, particularly if they intend pursuing new agendas in the future 'through' these personnel. While these suggestions are consistent with the organisational change and human resource management literature, the evidence from this study suggests they need to be revisited during change processes.

The first suggestion is that it is important for new executive leaders to understand and acknowledge that many of their key front-line leaders and managers (here, the district superintendents) in the organisation may hold high ownership of earlier strategic changes and that planned departures from this must be managed carefully. Demonstrating insights into what roles these people have played and what value they have added to the organisation is one element of this. This is particularly the case where such key leaders may have been very committed to the previous chief executive and his or her initiatives. Such loyalties must be handled sensitively to avoid potential resistance to future new agendas of the new chief executive.

Second, to avoid the perceptions of an organisational leadership vacuum, it is important to set out some future directions for the department generally, and for key leaders and managers in particular, as early as is practical. While it is accepted that developing and sharing new strategic initiatives takes time, a new chief executive should attempt to, concurrently, attend to his or her profile within the organisation, being both

seen and heard, acknowledging previous achievements, learning about the organisation and at the same time building enthusiasm for continued growth of the organisation.

Third, to reduce the likelihood of role conflict and role ambiguity, negotiation and consultation should occur as to how any new directions might impact on the roles and responsibilities of key leaders and managers. The greater the anticipated change to the roles, the more important these consultation and negotiation processes become, particularly if the incumbents have been earlier selected especially to carry out quite specific responsibilities.

Fourth, key leaders and managers need to know that they are valued and that the work that they have done and/or are currently doing is valued by the new chief executive, even if he or she has intentions of making changes in this regard. Perceptions of loss of importance or status within the organisation may hinder any future change processes. Therefore, they need to be reassured that they will remain important players for implementing possible future change. This demonstrates a confidence at the highest level of the organisation that existing personnel can take on different and perhaps expanded roles and achieve success in broader fields as the organisation moves towards different goals.

A range of strategies can be put in place to address some of these suggestions. Effective communication is paramount among these. Communication from the new chief executive to and from key leaders and managers will assist individuals to feel valued and help them understand their possible contributions to the organisation in the future. Professional development is also likely to be important to promote the transition to new and/or expanded roles, particularly if key leaders and managers have been earlier recruited to undertake quite specific and somewhat narrow roles. Formal and informal networks can also provide a collegial strategy support in achieving this.

The management of change remains as a constant in organisations today. As a result, human resource issues such as those identified in this study will continue to challenge leaders. What this study has highlighted is that it is vital for chief executives to be aware of how change impacts on front-line leaders and managers and how role ambiguity, for example, may occur as a result of lack of attention to effective communication. The success of a new chief executive's vision for the organisation can hinge on his or her ability to effectively 'recruit' existing front-line leaders and managers on taking up the new office. Successful recruitment of existing staff will improve the likelihood of an enthusiastic, confident senior staff who clearly understand their change and/or expanded roles in the organisation. It remains to be seen in this case if the district superintendents do in fact emerge as key change players in this regard for this government department. One of the participants in this study captures these issues well:

> I think my biggest challenge is trying to get some definition and sense out of the job. I guess I still feel a bit lost, caught across a range of tensions. What does the organisation really want me to do? I know my role is changing, I'm not absolutely sure how, but I need to hear something from the top. (Alex)

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