

Restructuring? A threat or an opportunity?

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Introduction

'Hi, haven't seen you for a while. How are things going?'. The start of a conversation that many of us will be having during the two days here in Belfast, with colleagues old and new. Discussion often turns to the latest changes at each university and it seems that we are all either going into, are in the middle of, or have just completed a restructure. Even one of our key funding bodies is not immune to the effects of change, and I am sure that we will all watch with interest as Geoff Robins settles into his new post of Transformation Director at UKRI.

The theme of conference this year is New Horizons: Prosperity and Resilience in Research Management. I am interested in how those of us in research support services manage to adapt the way in which we work to fit with change around us, how we can help to build resilience locally within our teams, and through that prosper as a profession service for our institutions.

Threat or Opportunity?

There are many theories for how an individual copes with change. One model often cited is an adaptation of Elisabeth Kübler Ross' five stages of grief [1], see change curve figure below. Whilst there are many critics of the theory and its adaptations, I think that we can all recognise the transitions that we go through, not necessarily sequentially and often not linear, as we adapt to a new situation.

My interest is in how a team can help each other to progress through the **Experiment – Decision – Integration** part of the change curve:

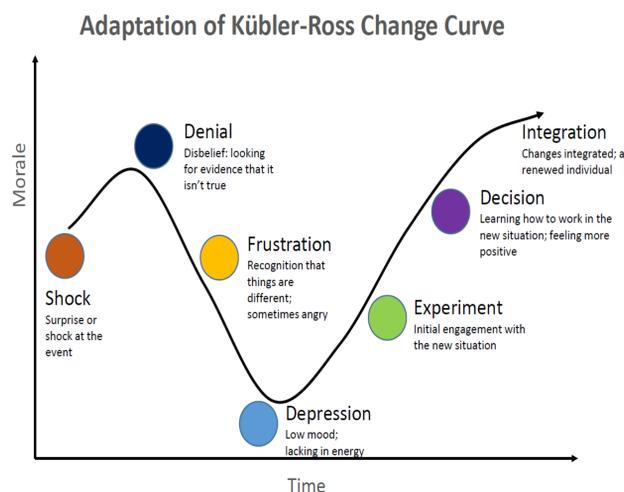
Experiment – in order to experiment we need to make the first small changes to engage with the new situation; building some **excitement** about the changes; teams can help each other by defining and solving problems;

Decision – learning how to work in a new situation requires **information and resources**; teams can help each other by creating common resources and identifying training for new skills (peer to peer, internal, external);

Integration – embedding new practices and ways to doing things is the final step; the big question here is '**is it working?**'; markers of success can add to the sense of progress.

Can we turn around the **threat**, perceived or real, of restructuring into an **opportunity** for building stronger, more resilient teams?

1. Kübler Ross, E. (1969). *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, ISBN 0-415-04015-9.



- Create alignment
- Maximise communication
- Spark motivation
- Develop capability
- Share knowledge



Case Study

Research Funding and Development Team

My own team went through a radical restructure 18 months ago. We were definitely on the white-knuckle roller coaster for the first few months. A catalyst for change came through the implementation of a new research management system. Problem solving and co-creating new central resources for the team all contributed to a sense of regaining some control. We were able to experiment with new ways of delivering research support, sharing the ups and downs. A key challenge now is how to measure our success as a team. We are not quite at the Tigger stage of happiness but definitely happier than Eeyore.

What's next?

When I submitted my abstract to ARMA I had in mind a workshop where colleagues could share experiences and examples of how to build resilience in teams. Conveying my thoughts and capturing your experiences is difficult through a poster! If you have found this idea interesting and would like to explore it further you can do so via an online survey <https://stirling.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/restructuring-a-threat-or-an-opportunity> or get in touch via email susan.alexander@stir.ac.uk. Perhaps a workshop or paper may yet emerge. Looking forward to speaking with you this week and hearing from you in the future.

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