

Innovation and resilience – the key to managing public sector change



Vlatka Hlupic, Professor of Business and Management at Westminster Business School

The public sector is in a state of unprecedented challenge as managers and leaders grapple with managing change amid major spending cuts. In such a climate, maintaining high performance, innovation and resilience can be difficult.

Vlatka Hlupic, Professor of Business and Management at Westminster Business School, is engaged in ongoing work and research that can help organisations take a strategic approach to empowering their employees – boosting morale and productivity in the process.

Her research shows that values such as trust and responsibility are far more likely to motivate staff, and that – rather than a preoccupation with individual performance – an environment based on collaboration and shared responsibility is what really boosts performance and productivity.

Professor Hlupic has also developed a questionnaire-based assessment tool which can help organisations identify where there are gaps and bottlenecks to innovation, high performance and resilience – significant issues to address in the current climate where the key challenge for the public sector is 'how to do more with less'.

She believes that if decisions are made on the basis of expertise rather than formal position in a hierarchical structure, more decisions can be made in parallel – and more efficiently – leading to better performance and customer satisfaction. “Leaders who can adapt their approach to meet the needs of the team help create motivation and gain commitment from their people,” says Professor Hlupic. “In such a strategy, leaders come to realise that while it may not initially be easy to give up power, more power and influence are gained subsequently by letting go.”

Professor Hlupic has developed the “6 Box Model” (in collaboration with Bruce Lewin of Four Groups) which enables organisations to identify where there are blocks and bottlenecks in relation to the six aspects that are critical to sustaining high performance: culture; relationships; individuals; strategy; systems and resources. The 6 Box Model offers a high-level, holistic view of organisations, explains Professor Hlupic. “It looks at everything, not just management processes, so it includes things such as the skill levels of individuals and how motivated they are, the strength of group relations, how individuals in teams interact with each other and so forth.”

She continues: “Given the challenging times for organisations in the public sector, it’s critical that they keep striving for innovation. As a first step, they should look at themselves as complex, adaptive systems which facilitate networking and cooperation among their people and where managers use a coaching style, delegating responsibilities rather than tasks and recognising the competencies of their people rather than their positions. This will help empower staff to make decisions.”

“It’s important that they change their culture on a sustainable basis. To do that, they must change their mindset and distribute authority and decision-making on the basis of knowledge and skills rather than on the formal position in organisational hierarchy. They also need to support self-organisation in informal networks and communities of interests, encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing and experimentation with ideas. Last but not least, developing a caring culture based on trust and transparency is also an important part of this strategy, which can make a significant impact on staff engagement, productivity and overall performance of an organisation.”

The 6 Box Model is just one way that Westminster Business School is working with individuals and organisations in the public as well as private sector to help them understand the key aspects that drive performance. “As a business school, Westminster has much experience of working with the public sector, for example in providing executive training in the NHS,” she says. “One of the pilots for our 6 Box Model was an NHS organisation.”

Professor Hlupic’s 6 Box Model is a free performance and strategy based assessment tool available to organisations through which they may identify where there are gaps and bottlenecks to innovation, high performance and resilience. To find out more about the tool, or to implement it within your organisation, please contact Professor Hlupic at v.hlupic-vidjak@westminster.ac.uk.

For more information about Westminster Business School, please visit westminster.ac.uk/wbs



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