

Housing – Managing through change – Building relationships in new teams

A short guide by Virtual College

Introduction

Bedroom tax, funding and other ever-changing government policies have been at the root of many restructures in the housing sector over the past few years. As organisations adapt to a tough new landscape, through downsizing, redundancies or restructuring, employees are continuously adapting to working in new teams with new people.

While much uncertainty and speculation remains in terms of what the future may bring for the social housing sector, there are numerous ways managers can improve the working environment and help their employees adapt. Successfully doing so will drive up productivity, morale, quality and efficiency through strong teamwork and collaboration - and could just be the key to pulling organisations through tough times.

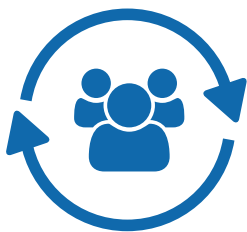


Why are work relationships important?

As many issues are impacting upon the social housing sector, making sure that work relationships are at a strong level is more important than ever before. Not only do good work relationships within teams boost productivity and increase team morale, but they also increase retention and contribute to the overall success of a business.

Looking at the bottom line, some senior managers can be quick to dismiss things like employee happiness and retention as less important than finances. It is important to realise, however, that this is a two-way relationship, and that cultivating strong and happy teams is far more likely to lead to better monetary results than a less people-minded approach.

When it comes to how to build relationships within new teams, it's not all bonding 'away days' and 'trust falls', however. In this guide, we'll explore the essential steps managers can take to building successful new teams.



Get to know each other

It might sound simple, but getting to know your team, and setting up situations where they are encouraged to get to know each other, is vital when it comes to building a successful team.

Whoever you're working with, it's very helpful to know the type of person they are so you can communicate with them in a manner that they will be receptive to, know how to motivate them, and ensure you don't offend.

Most teams will be a melting pot of different characters and personalities, which can be a strength rather than a negative, but it's up to you as a manager to facilitate positive communication and ensure quieter employees are not overshadowed or forgotten about due to those with bigger personalities.

Work perks can be a double blessing, allowing you to show your team that you value them while also helping them to bond in fun, non-work situations, whether this is getting a round in at the bar or installing a Playstation in the office.



Don't play favourites: every employee's opinion is equally valuable

Playing favourites as a manager is a sure fire way to turn a team against each other. The fact is that some employees are going to be easier to work with, or perhaps more talented, but this doesn't mean that you should praise them and give them opportunities to the detriment of the rest of the team.

People need to feel valued and to know that what they do every weekday has a purpose. As such, everyone's ideas should be treated with equal respect.

The American Psychology Association's workplace survey by Harrison Interactive found last year that employees who report feeling valued by their employer are 60 per cent more likely to say they are motivated to do their very best in their job.



Communication and transparency

The suspicion that there are secrets and that things are being kept from you in the workplace is the fastest way to breed paranoia and break down relationships.

High levels of communication between the team should be promoted, from looping colleagues into emails to setting aside time once a week for team meetings in which everyone is given a chance to talk about what they've been working on.

The right level of transparency is difficult to attain: while you want to be open and honest with your managerial charges, you don't want to alarm them. The best approach is to explain why certain things are happening to help them see situations from your point of view.

One thing you must not do is tell one or more members of the team while keeping such information from others. This is bound to get out, and will harm your team's trust in you, perhaps leading them to question your leadership. Information should be rolled out to everyone simultaneously.

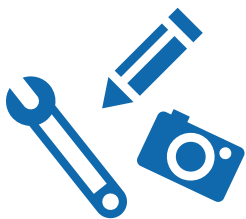




Share good work and praise widely

Do not undervalue praise, whether it comes from you or other team members. Where good work has taken place, ensure you positively reinforce it by sharing what has happened widely and, where appropriate, offering rewards.

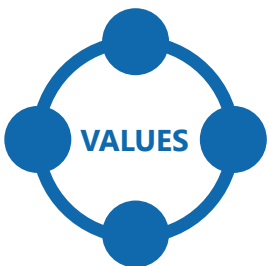
However, it's not enough for the manager to be handing out praise. Try to foster a team culture where the first response to good feedback or a great piece of work is a pat on the back rather than jealousy.



Make no room for ego

Ensure the team is aware that they are working towards one common goal and each of their skills play a part in achieving this. While no-one wants to see a colleague get their feelings hurt, there should be no room for huge egos, who believe they are better than others on the team, as this is likely to foster resentment and make people less willing to communicate and share ideas.

Encourage learning and sharing: there is something that everyone on the team will be able to teach the others that will expand their knowledge or upskill them in some way.

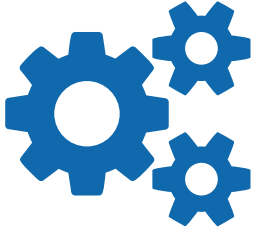


Set clear ground rules and values

As creative and flexible as you want your team to be, every group needs boundaries. Clear ground rules or team values should be established and clearly communicated.

This will aim to ensure that if someone is out of line, it is immediately obvious to you and the others on the team, and you will be able to pull them up on what they've done.

Furthermore, get everyone involved in creating team values: you can even give yourselves a fun internal name! The democratic approach to this will mean that the final set of values will be a true reflection of the people on the team and their skills and attitudes - and the team will have no choice but to get behind them!



Create a process for reaching consensus, 121s and conflict resolution

Similarly, in order to stop team members feeling like they've been treated unfairly, clear processes need to be put in place for things like big decisions, 121s and conflict resolution.

This will ensure that every enquiry or problem will be dealt with in exactly the same way, with the same level of attention paid to it. By holding structured 121s, you're also avoiding the problem of spending more time talking to staff you like, and paying less attention to others.



Be a support system and show you care

Tom Gaynor, employee benefits director of MetLife UK, recently said: "Managers have a crucial role to play in helping employees manage their own stress and we know from our Employee Benefit Trends study that a supportive manager is a significant driver of employee engagement.

"Creating a supportive leadership culture helps managers tune in to employees' emotional ups and downs."

While you will want to avoid becoming too close to employees, knowing if they are facing difficult problems outside of work will help you to treat them fairly during office hours, and understand where they are coming from.

Knowing they have the support of both you and the team, even just in daily life, will mean a lot to any staff member, and could help them to be both engaged with their work, and forge great relationships with those they work with.



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