



BRUCE BALANCE
ACTIVATING LEADERSHIP

"It's not me, it's you"

Redundancy Re-ignition Programs



Re-ignition Programs: when redundancy comes and you're a survivor

Re-ignition Programs

*Successful redundancy programs provide **all** employees with appropriate support.*

Those being outplaced externally and those being displaced internally.

Redundancy often leaves an enduring sense of displacement.

It is prominent within the organisation and amongst the survivors.

Organisational restructures are a regular part of working life. Whether its via mergers, acquisitions, realignment, diversification, takeovers, or just "trimming the fat", many organisations encounter a period of upheaval when employees are "let go".

When employees have been made redundant it is extremely important that the organisation focuses on providing support and a sense of dignity to the individuals transitioning out of the organisation. A key component of this process is to recognise their past contribution.

Whilst Outplacement Programs may be seen as an obvious activity, it is perhaps surprising the number of organisations that see this as a nice to have instead of a must have.

In my experience, I have found that a structured, tailored and well-positioned coaching program for each individual is the best approach to provide for employees encountering redundancy. This is from the perspective of the employee(s) impacted, the colleagues remaining and the organisation as a whole.

Redundancy, especially if unexpected, can often also affect the remaining employees and they will be watching closely how their colleagues are being treated.

It is these people that I'd like to focus on. They largely fall into two groups; both deemed "survivors". And it is these survivors who become *Displaced Employees* requiring just as much attention, focus and support, as their colleagues who have been made redundant.

The Survivors: Two groups

The first group of survivors are those who had a role in the restructure and/or knew about the impact before those impacted did. Often they were the ones who delivered the news to those being made redundant.

This group is primarily made up of HR professionals, senior leaders and the executive team.

Admittedly, it could be said that this task comes with the role, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they are equipped or even skilled to cope or deal with life as a survivor – especially if they delivered the news to colleagues they have known and worked with for a significant time.

The second group is those who perhaps didn't know, and may have been blissfully unaware that something was about to happen. However, they're all of a sudden left with a sense of emptiness and loss and "it could have been me".

Often both groups of survivors have a sense of guilt and don't know how to deal with their frustrations and emotions. Some of these emotions swell up into a sense of anxiety when they realise that they may be expected to take on new and/or increased activities as the new organisational structure is implemented.

Others may feel a sense of jealousy that their departed colleagues have gotten a perceived financial windfall (although this is rarely the case).

Displacement – a survivor's perspective

Overall, an enduring sense of displacement is prominent within the organisation and amongst the survivors.

Employees, team norms, behaviours, short-term goals, progress, team cohesion, loyalty, allegiances, recognition, reward, acknowledgement and culture are all displaced.

The negative impact on productivity, customer loyalty, market position, brand and reputation has the potential to be quite significant. Yet this is often overlooked, ignored or even disregarded.

Surviving employees tend to shrink into a world of self-preservation and self-protection.

Often factions form between the two surviving groups: those who knew about and played a role in forming and delivering the message; and those who didn't know in advance.

Importantly, this displacement becomes self-perpetuating in that it is a factor of, and contributes to, the culture of the organisation.

It is also influenced by the communications accompanying the redundancy announcement, the tenure of those involved, the performance of the organisation and the intent behind the current situation (i.e. reactionary to market pressures or a bold new initiative that will position the organisation into an exciting new future).

Re-ignition – the way forward

Once displacement has set in it can be difficult to shift.

Organisational leaders can find that all the benefits expected from the initiative that triggered the redundancies quickly disappear, or even fail to materialise.

Employees, and the organisation as a whole, need to rapidly be re-ignited so they can remain focused on the daily tasks as well as the overall strategic direction.

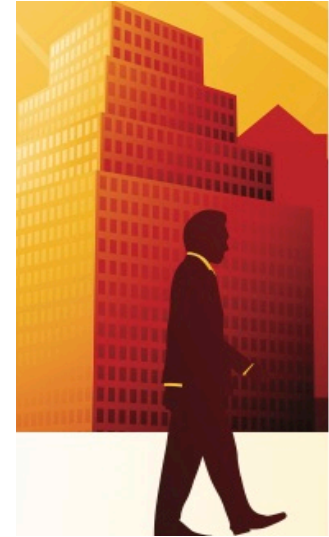
Employee re-ignition can come in many forms and be as simple as ensuring the senior leaders are visible and share key messages in an open and honest manner.

However, more formal and structured re-ignition activities are often warranted, not only because they help ensure employees are re-ignited in terms of their role's objectives,

but they are re-ignited with the new organisational culture and attitude that emerges from a major redundancy initiative.

This helps reassure all surviving employees that they can play a valued role in the future success of the organisation.

We will discuss the types of **Re-ignition Programs** shortly, but first a recap on Outplacement Programs.



Outplacement Programs – for when you're leaving

When we implement an outplacement program, we seek to empower the transitioning employee(s) so they become accountable for their present circumstances and take responsibility for their future. Traditionally this is done via a one-on-one coaching program, but on occasions group activities are appropriate.

Importantly, the program immediately provides individuals with the tools and techniques to enable them to overcome the initial emotional impact of being made redundant and guide them through a process of self-discovery.

This allows the individual to focus on becoming active in the search for a new beginning, whether it is a similar role, a new career or a new direction.

We typically offer a range of follow on workshops that provide tools and techniques that enable exiting employees to successfully transition into a new career &/or lifestyle, to activate their career, to connect with their network and to strengthen their professional impact.

The starting point for these Outplacement Programs is often a very simple offering where Initial Support is provided immediately following the redundancy notification.

This often consists of providing the redundant employee(s) an opportunity to vent and/or acknowledge their new circumstances and ensuring that they are able to exit the premises in a dignified and respectful manner.

Sadly, this simple step is too often overlooked by organisations.

Re-ignition Programs – for when you’re remaining

When you’re remaining with the organisation that has changed, merged, acquired, transformed &/or restructured and after colleagues, co-workers, team members &/or managers have been “let go” your world will never be the same.

As mentioned earlier, a sense of displacement often shows up. This can go on for weeks and months and can impact the effectiveness of both the organisation and the teams/units/divisions/etc.

Additionally, once it becomes a common belief that those made redundant are “enjoying the perks” of an Outplacement Program and/or they are “laughing all the way to the bank” to cash their payout, then this may impact the mood, engagement and productivity of the survivors.

In extreme situations they may simply begin to think, “Why wasn’t it me?”

It is vital therefore that organisations provide just as much support to, and monitoring of, the survivors.

This will go a long way to ensure that they remain fully effective and empowered employees. It will also go a long way to keep stakeholders satisfied that the initiative was actually necessary in the first place and that it was subsequently executed appropriately.

When the organisation is operating under an Industrial Relations and/or Employee Relations spotlight, then the implementation of appropriate Re-ignition Programs becomes even more vital.

Some examples of how Re-ignition Programs can be structured for the survivors of redundancy initiatives are:

- **Preparation Meeting** - for staff responsible for communicating the redundancies. The objective is to ensure staff are emotionally and energetically prepared and have focus and presence to be able to undertake the task in a professional manner that ensures dignity and respect for all involved.
- **Positioning Meeting** – for colleagues and co-workers after the redundancy announcement. Normally done for intact teams, this gives employees an opportunity to vent and/or acknowledge the new situation and ensuring that they are able to share their concerns about the future for both their departing colleagues and for themselves as individuals and as a team.
- **Debrief Session** - for staff who have communicated the redundancy. These sessions provide an opportunity to debrief, re-focus and reenergise and to reassure them that they are performing the duties required of their role.
- **Employee Empowerment Programs** – These programs form the basis of a focused and structured Re-ignition Program. Refer next section for details.

Employee Empowerment Programs – a guide to survival

Employee Empowerment Programs are programs tailored for an organisation’s priorities that allow it to provide employees with a renewed focus on empowering themselves to advance their career internally within the organisation and to also allow them to be more adaptive to the possible ambiguous organisational environment in the future.



In other words, employees are able to gain a stronger sense of ownership about their future and this will undoubtedly prove to be in the best interests of the organisation as employees will be more engaged and better equipped to contribute to the organisation's success.

These programs cover a range of topics that provide opportunities for self-reflection and raised self-awareness within the organisational context.

Importantly, they are designed and structured with the organisation's strategic objectives in mind whilst having foundations in seeking to raise employee engagement.

Additional information on the structure, duration and topics included in these Employee Empowerment Programs are available by request.

Primarily, we seek to tailor a solution most appropriate to our client's and the parameters under which they are operating.

Conclusion

Admittedly, much good comes from redundancy programs. Both to the organisation and to those being "shared with the competition". And I'm sure that there are many redundant employees who are secretly pleased with the outcome from their perspective.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that too often the impact of, and fallout from, a redundancy is inaccurately predicted, mistakenly calculated and poorly managed.

Considerable focus and support has been provided in the past by many organisations to their departing staff. However, more can still be achieved.

Equally important, organisations also must be mindful of the need to have dedicated and specific Re-ignition Programs for their surviving employees.

Failure to do so will help perpetuate the stigma that surviving a redundancy makes you just as much a loser as those who don't.

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