Abstract

St Pats College

Reference: Case Study BP626

Title: Managing Change – Implementing a new strategic vision

Overview: In 2004, new HoD Technology Brian Allen provided leadership and a fresh strategic approach to the teaching at St Patrick's College's Technology Department, which was in the midst of extensive changes. He worked closely with teacher Chris Smyth, who took over the HOD role when Brian left at the end of 2006, and continued to manage the change process and move the Department forward.

Focus points:

- Developing and communicating a vision
- Establishing a team culture
- Building on individual strengths
- Change in manageable chunks
- Succession planning

Overview

Two caterpillars were talking when a butterfly floated past. One caterpillar turned to the other and said: 'You'll never get me up in one of those butterfly things.

Attitudes to change vary. Some see opportunity, rejuvenation, and growth, while others see instability, upheaval, and threat. Whether people perceive change with excitement and confidence or with fear and anxiety (or somewhere in between), depends partly on the individual and partly on the nature of the change.

How change is perceived also depends on how it's managed. Managing change is about implementing new processes and overcoming resistance to change. Change management is the process of developing a planned approach to change; at heart, it is a human resource issue.

Brian Allen has seen a lot of change since he trained as a woodwork teacher at the Auckland College of Teaching in 1972. Brian sat on the 1983 Ministry of Education committee that looked at technology teaching and led the change to the teaching of Technology in several schools. In 2004 he became HOD Technology at St Patrick's College, Kilbirnie, Wellington, charged with rejuvenating the school's Technology Department.

While at St Pats, Brian participated in the Wellington cluster of Beacon Practice schools. In 2006, Brian left the school to become a Technology Advisor, with Massey University.

In his place, Chris Smyth was appointed Acting HOD Technology. Chris gained a BDes Design Degree with a major in Visual Communications Design, from Wellington Polytechnic/Victoria University in 1995 and spent six and a half years as a freelance technical illustrator, illustrator, designer, painter and model maker. After completing his Graduate Diploma in Teaching-Secondary, from Wellington College of Education in 2002, Chris joined the staff at St Pat's. Initially his energies were divided between two departments – the Visual Art Department, and the Technology and Graphics Department. As a designer, his teaching and planning philosophy was to take a holistic approach. The Technology HOD at the time allowed him to plan and teach new units of work, with an emphasis on combining several of the traditional 'technological areas' in one project, for example, integrating materials, structures and mechanisms and electronics. After six months, Chris moved out of the Art Department to teach Technology and Graphics exclusively. Following Brian's arrival, Chris was appointed assistant HOD Technology and Graphics. In 2006, he began to participate in the Wellington cluster of Beacon Practice schools; at the end of that year he was appointed acting HOD Technology. He has recently been appointed HOD Technology as a permanent position, and currently teaches Print Design, Materials, Electronics and Control, and Graphics to Year 13.

Laying the foundations (2004-2006)– Brian Allen

When Brian started at St Pat's in 2004 he found a Technology Department undergoing rapid change. The two relatively inexperienced teachers there, Chris and chemistry graduate John Davidson were doing their best to square away their expectations and training with departmental reality. The Department's other teacher, who had been at the school 20 years, was on an extended leave, which became permanent around the time Brian arrived. Other teachers had left earlier, having lost motivation due, at least in part, to their disenchantment over the G3 qualification issue. Chris was the only teacher remaining of the four who had been in the Department when he began there 18 months earlier. (Despite this disruption, Chris says he had received good support and encouragement from the previous HOD, and had considerable professional development over the period, attending electronics courses, and several NCEA jumbo days.) However, the Department lacked direction and was in need of a rejuvenated vision.

Brian saw the two young teachers had potential and set about helping them to realise it more fully.

"The very first thing I did when I arrived was to run my training programme." This is a teacher training programme that identifies the key issues in technology teaching practice. It breaks down the original Technology "Brown Book" into small pieces and reassembles them "like a blocklayer" into a planning format document that teachers can use to plan work units. Brian originally developed this programme during his time at Otaki College, where he had been challenged to turn technical teachers into teachers of Technology. At that time it was three pages long; today the programme runs to over 15 pages.

Planning for progression

Brian wanted to establish a seamless progression for students as they moved from Year 9 through to Year 13. To achieve this, he needed Chris and John to understand how to plan for progression and appreciate why this was important. He wanted them to work together and design their lessons both vertically (in terms of progression) and horizontally (in terms of context). Each lesson was to be part of a continuum rather than stand-alone and in isolation. Brian credits Cliff Harwood with providing the academic basis for the changes he had in mind.

Chris had entered teaching with this same strategic approach, and had already planned his whole-year Year 10, 11 and 12 Graphics programmes in which skills and knowledge were scaffolded through the year levels. He had also planned a number of junior Technology units within the structure provided by the previous HOD. Chris was pleased to find that Brian was providing the structure and environment for this approach to be implemented across the whole Department, with involvement from each of the teachers.

Chris and John "soaked up" these ideas, Brian says. "I think Chris saw that my management style and the change in direction I was proposing sat more comfortably with his previous training than with his experiences as a first-year teacher."

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Planning for progression, Brian says, is a process of reverse engineering – of knowing where you want Year 13 students to be at the end of their studies and working backwards from that point. Brian, Chris and John broke this down and identified the areas Years 9 and 10 students had to develop in before moving into Years 11 and 12.

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Chris comments that this was not entirely new ground, but there were definite areas of weakness that needed addressing. "It must be remembered that NCEA was in its early stages, with the rapid introduction of Level 2 and 3 causing more than a few difficulties in terms of adjusting programmes of learning to suit this style of assessment. The change to

standards based assessment was a positive one, but the way it was introduced had a negative impact on workload and on addressing inconsistencies in particular."

Brian wanted students to approach their first NCEA year armed with confidence, knowledge and skills. Chris says that to any teacher this is common sense, but it takes time and a process of 'stepping back' and looking at the big picture before working out the details of a programme. He likens the approach to painting a picture or creating an image in Photoshop, where the large areas are 'blocked in' first, before standing back (or zooming out) and checking the work as a whole, from a distance, then returning to the detail.

In putting the theory into practice, Brian reorganised the deployment of his teachers. Instead of having each Technology class go to a teacher for a term then move onto another the following term, each class was assigned a teacher for a year.

Managing Relationships

Teaching is all about relationships, Brian believes, and that managing changes in teaching styles and approaches is all about managing relationships. Consultation and collaboration are key: "Teachers must seem themselves as part of a team. This is absolutely critical."

Teachers must be given the confidence to change their teaching programmes to best suit the needs of their particular students while delivering the curriculum effectively and giving them the confidence to deal with classroom issues, he says. "You have to empower them to be better teachers."

Chris agrees and says it's important to have a clear understanding of the strengths of each individual teacher in a department. A leader must understand what motivates his or her teachers and understand how they derive enjoyment from their vocation. A happy teacher who feels supported and valued is, he says, more likely to be a productive teacher. "We all have strengths and weaknesses – there is no perfect teacher! Making the most of each teacher's strengths and as a team supporting each other in the weaker areas assists in creating a department that functions effectively and moves forward."

Change must also be brought about through working well with senior management and clearly outlining a strong vision and direction, Brian says. "When I was appointed there, I had a meeting with the principal and a BOT rep and we talked about my vision of technology education and how I wanted the school to become one of the top technology schools in the Wellington area. I wanted it as a model, so that people could look at the school and say: 'I can learn from this school and apply it to my own school and my own teaching in terms of technology education.' That was the driving force behind it."

To Brian, the key to smoothly managing change is to always see (and have those around you see) change in a good light, in a positive way. "It's an attitude. If you see change as negative, it will be."

Chris concurs, and adds that positive change is not about saying 'what we are doing is rubbish. Let's scrap it all and start again'. "Rather, it's about recognising what we are doing well, being realistic about our failings, and formulating a plan that will move us forward, that will take us closer to the goals we have set ourselves in line with our vision. That vision needs to be developed collaboratively, by the team, rather than imposed by one person. The best leaders, in my opinion, are the ones who understand that they are one part of the team."

A new Vision Statement

Brian's vision is encapsulated in the Department's 2006 Vision Statement:

"We want boys to succeed in Technology and Graphics at St Pat's College. So our goal of the Technology Department is to create an environment that boys want to work in such that they:

- Are empowered to engage in their own learning.
- Are allowed to take risks in a controlled environment.
- See that learning also takes place within the community.
- Understand that striving for excellence is a process that they can be involved in.
- See that learning can impact on the world they live in.

Moving forward in 2007 – Chris Smythe

Refining the vision

At the end of Term Two 2006, Brian indicated that he would not be returning to the school for 2007 and Chris applied (successfully) for the Acting HOD position.

While preparing his application Chris further developed and refined his vision for the future of the Department.

"We see our first priority is to provide opportunities for students to develop, learn and achieve in a wide variety of areas of interest and aptitude. We have made great strides in this area in 2007. We are aiming to continue to develop our courses in order to provide multiple pathways for students in their preparation for tertiary study and potential careers. To do this effectively we need to work more closely with our Transition Department, tertiary providers, industry mentors and others who are able to provide support and inspiration to our students.

"A high priority is the implementation of the revised Technology curriculum. We have had a good deal of input in this area as a consequence of our involvement in the Beacon project. Each of our teachers would like to be supported in their professional development towards becoming leading technology teachers.

"We will continue to actively work together to provide an environment for staff that is stimulating, rewarding and enjoyable.

"Our Department has a leading role to play within the school, to develop a sense of community with other departments. This includes continuing leadership in developing programmes and projects that involve integration of different learning areas for the benefit of our students, and, incidentally, in line with the revised curriculum.

"We also see ourselves as having a role to play in passing on some of what we have learned to the wider technology education community, for example through case studies such as these."

Planning for 2007

Chris spent the 2006-07 summer following his appointment as Acting HOD planning ways of putting in place some of the things to emerge from the Beacon Cluster meetings. He wanted to build on Brian's vision and maintain the momentum of what had been achieved under his leadership over the previous three years.

"What I really appreciated about Brian's leadership was the sense of teamwork, of getting the Department working openly, supportively and collaboratively. Brian had a wonderful way of allowing each member of the team to work to their strengths. He involved me in the philosophical overview of what we were doing, and the detail of planning and assessment of many of our programmes and units of work. This is where my interests and abilities lie, along with the individual development of students. Brian also developed an excellent relationship with senior management. As a department, we have gained a lot of credibility through our transparent approach to positive change."

One of his first tasks was to modify the Department's vision statement for 2007, as follows:

"We want students to become successful and confident in Technology and Graphics at St Patrick's College. Our goal for the Technology Department is to create an environment in which students:

* learn to work independently.

* discover their creative ability.

* become problem solvers.

* strive for excellence.

* become aware that they can make a difference in their world.

* become life-long learners."

"The pursuit of quality teaching and classroom programmes remains a priority this year in the Technology and Graphics Department. We have initiated the use of detailed student profiles with all our classes at the beginning of the year, which are then used to adapt our planned teaching and learning programmes to student's personal strengths, interests, goals and learning styles. We continue to develop the use of varied teaching methods relevant to the

particular characteristics of each group of students, with an awareness of individual learning needs.

We continue to strive to improve achievement at all levels, in particular at NCEA level."

The statement emphasises an area Chris believes is key to student success – of teachers understanding their students, and students understanding themselves. This sort of understanding leads to the teacher adapting teaching methods and programme content to best suit student learning needs, he believes.

The improved planning for progression that had taken place at junior levels meant that senior students were ready to tackle relatively complex and demanding projects. In 2007, Chris opened up project work in the senior Technology courses to allow students to select from a diverse range of projects. He did this in collaboration with John Davidson, who teaches the largest group of senior students (about 25) at Year 11. Chris teaches Year 12 and 13 combined, with seven students integrated into the NCEA Level 2 Graphics class in 2007. With a wider choice of projects, students develop their technological knowledge and skills in a context that they are more passionate about, and has significantly improved their motivation and 'buy-in'.

Collaborative links – school and industry

Chris has an interest in developing collaborative links with other St Pats' departments. During his teacher training he developed a cross curricular (NCEA Level 2) film-making unit of work in both Visual Art and Technology, which allowed him to work through the possibilities of this approach. The focus of his Beacon work in 2006 was the creation of a project designed to test ideas and raise awareness in the college of the potential of this type of teaching. During the first four weeks of Term One 2006 he outlined a proposal for such a collaborative project to teachers from other departments and gained support from the Religious Education, English and Music Departments, which offered to adapt some of their lessons or make resources available for the project.

Chris had two Year 10 classes use the context of robotics to create two stop-motion animated parables communicating the values of St Patrick's College. The target audience for the films were Y8 students from the college's feeder schools (and their parents). The key stakeholders included the Rector of St Patrick's and the wider community of the College. Outside experts consulted during the project included teachers from the Religious Education, English, and Music Departments along with Year 12 Graphics students, who designed and made the animation puppets used.

Chris comments that the ambitious exercise was a good example of standing back and seeing where links could be made, before detailed planning began. The result was showcased at a technology presentation by students from the Beacon Practice Wellington cluster at Parliament on 31 October 2006.

"In 2005 and 2006, I had surveyed all of my students at the beginning of the year. This included such things as their interests, skills, sports, potential career aspirations as well as aspects to do with learning styles – how they prefer to or most effectively learn and study, both at school and at home. For example, whether they prefer to work collaboratively or individually, the environment they work in best (noise levels, music, lighting, sitting at a desk, on a couch or bed, on the floor, etc). At the beginning of 2007 I provided examples of these to each of the teachers in the Department and asked them to use something similar with their own classes."

Chris was also keen to firm up links with a local electronic product developer SurveyLab. The ongoing and highly successful relationship with the company began at the beginning of Brian's time as HOD, and Chris was keen to take it further. See The St Patrick's College/SurveyLab Link <http://www.techlink.org.nz/Case-studies/enterprise/st-patricks-survey-lab/>.

What next

The St Patrick's College Technology Department has seen a lot of change over the past few years, and, as with the nature of Technology, will witness more change in the coming years if it is to grow. The Department recently appointed a new teacher for 2008, to take the place of the fourth teacher who is moving on to another role elsewhere.

When asked for advice to others for managing change within a technology department Chris identifies six key points :

1. Have a positive attitude.
2. Work as a team.
3. Develop a vision.
4. Create an open working environment.
5. Keep moving forward – evaluate, refine, improve.
6. CELEBRATE SUCCESS! ("We have a saying in our Department. When one of the others does something quite good, we say "Genius!" And we say to each other, and even more to our students, "You can do it.")

Asked to suggest an apt way of ending this case study of change management, Chris suggested the following parable.

Two butterflies were floating high above a caterpillar, who was crawling along the ground. One butterfly looked at the other and said "he doesn't know what he's missing.

The next day, the same two butterflies were floating past the same spot. All of a sudden, something ripped through the wing of one of the butterflies, and he plummeted to the ground. The second butterfly saw that the caterpillar, far below, was wielding a gun…

Don't be that caterpillar. One day, when you are a butterfly, you will regret it.