

Resilience for change

Mergers, takeovers and large-scale restructuring are now an acknowledged part of the landscape in many sectors of Europe's economy. The inevitable changes can often be highly disruptive to organisational output and employees' sense of well-being alike. Even those organisations with strong aspirations to be exemplary employers find the successful micro-management of mergers difficult to achieve: successive studies reveal enduring legacies of dissatisfaction caused by employees feeling undervalued, deprived of a voice in change processes and sometimes with a sense of having been treated comparatively unfairly. Increased employee turnover, disengagement, absences from work, stress and ill-health are commonly-reported consequences. While it is difficult to separate the effects of factors such as lifestyle, studies particularly in the public services and health care sectors establish the part that job insecurity can play as a risk factor for common infections and even more serious conditions such as myocardial infarction and stroke.

Employers also lose out in other ways. Redesigning organisational structures along lines which seem logical from a strategic management perspective runs the risk of ignoring the tacit knowledge of front line employees: the hard-earned knowledge of "what works" and what needs to be done outside of formal structures and procedures in order to keep any organisation functioning well. To ignore such knowledge and experience may create additional obstacles and a prolonged learning and adjustment process during the implementation of change, as well as causing disaffection and widespread cynicism.

Yet in many cases these negative outcomes appear largely avoidable. Appreciating employees 'know how' and retaining their respect can reap dividends for the organisation's future reputation. Detailed planning and preparation, openness and the active involvement of affected employees at the earliest possible stage can prevent many subsequent difficulties. This typically means that issues are identified too late, once problems have already started to emerge and opportunities for positive intervention have been lost. Omissions in planning, preparation and implementation reported in previous work by project partners include:

- Failure to communicate and discuss the business case for merger or restructuring with affected employees, leading to scepticism and distrust.
- Lack of recognition of the existing characteristics of organisations involved in merger, perhaps leading to the inadvertent loss of positive practices and lost opportunities to instigate improvements.
- Failure to plan implementation sufficiently early, with the result that options are constrained by decisions taken earlier in the process.
- Lack of front line involvement in the design of operating procedures and protocols, with the resulting failure to exploit the combined experience of the different parts of the merged organisation or to recognise their specific needs and circumstances.
- Failure to identify solutions beneficial to all parties caused by the lack of early dialogue with employees likely to be affected by job change, redeployment or redundancy and a premature recourse to formal HR procedures.

However managers responsible for the design and implementation of mergers and other major forms of restructuring, as well as social partner representatives, often lack evidence-based resources and tools to help them, forcing them to learn on the job through trial and error. It is this gap that **RESILIENCE** is designed to address.