

# Mobilising New Contracts

## Optimising the process through people power

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Large, fragmented estates with multiple properties present unique challenges when management and contractual responsibility for them changes hands. Addressing the mobilisation issues this raises, demands expertise and experience on many levels. But in pursuit of a smooth transition, one critical success factor can get overlooked more frequently than it should: the people element.

Mobilising new contracts is always complex. It's all about planning, understanding the detail, ensuring nothing is left to chance and aligning all the commercial, technical, legal and financial issues. However, the *real* art behind successful mobilisation doesn't in fact lie with all these familiar issues, pivotal though they are, of course.

The true measure of success is often found in how good you are at engaging with the most important element of all, the people – those who may be moving into your organisation as part of the mobilisation, the new teams you are going to work with and, of course, the people back in your own business. Get this wrong and it doesn't matter how smart your technical team is or how comprehensive the due diligence, the whole process can be undermined by a lack of care and consideration towards the people who matter and who are going to make it work on the ground. Winning their support – and importantly, their respect – is crucial.

By and large, it's not that companies don't care about this or don't understand the need for it. But in a process dominated by, sometimes, highly complex financial, legal, technical and commercial considerations, keeping it front of mind and making it happen can be challenging. The 'technical' HR piece will be mapped into the process

as a matter of course, but the engagement piece can easily slip into the long grass. And it happens, at least in part, because it won't break or delay the agreement, but also because it's perceived as a 'soft' function, a hygiene factor. The fact of the matter is, it's anything but.

### **Building in the human touch**

Actively elevating the status of people and placing them at the heart of the mobilisation process will pay dividends particularly on Day One of the contract, when everyone wants to see a seamless transition. Those early, formative days set the nature and tone of the relationship for at least the near and mid terms, and possibly much further down the road than that. A motivated and contented team will work much more effectively in the long term so getting it right is a business imperative.

It's ironic that in trying to square the deal, plan the mobilisation and guarantee ongoing service delivery, it's all too easy to lose sight of the one thing that will ultimately prove to be so pivotal to the success of all of these – the emotional and professional needs of the people on the front line.

So, what are the key issues in providing a better balance of interests?



First and foremost, we should see the situation for what it is. It's not just a deal and a new contract start, it's a change management exercise – anything from a major TUPE transaction to a more straightforward model, which might only involve some sort of a partnering arrangement. But whatever the nature and scale, it's change, both for your client's employees and suppliers and for your own people.

### Understanding the change issues

In any change environment, there's a very significant human factor that needs to be taken into account. When, as individuals or teams, we are part of an effort to introduce change, it can be intoxicating and exciting – if somewhat stressful. We are in control – leading, making decisions, driving things forward. But imagine what it's like when the converse is true – and most of us have experienced it – when, without any say in the matter, we are subjected to change. It can be a very uncomfortable place to be. You have little or no control over what is happening and as far as you can see are facing a future full of uncertainty and ambiguity. It's true that for

some people, particularly the more experienced, change can represent opportunity and for others it's a cause of indifference. But it's equally true that in general, people are hard wired to believe the worst rather than the best. And it's on this that management and leadership effort needs to be focused.

Without even realising it, good people put up barriers and become resistant. The best among them – the people you definitely don't want to lose – decide to take back some control and put themselves on the market. And so it goes on. No engagement plan in the world will stop these things from happening, but properly thought through, it can provide an invaluable route map, allowing you to manage the process in a strategic manner rather than just deal with it in what can easily become an ad-hoc and inconsistent tactical exercise.

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Core to this is the communication approach, which needs to be firmly based on the theory that it is virtually impossible to over-communicate during a period of change. Ensuring all employees, suppliers, advisers and various other stakeholders know exactly what is happening and when, and what their respective roles and responsibilities are is central, and frequently demands multi-channel communications. But equally importantly, the employees

at the centre of the activity need to be reassured – as far as possible – about their own personal circumstances. People need a clearly articulated vision for them, their co-workers and the business.

At the end of the day, leaving aside the obvious virtue of doing the right thing from a moral perspective, it makes good sense from a practical business point of view. All good leaders need good people around them; and it adds up commercially to treat your people well. An informed, well-treated and motivated workforce will always be more productive.

As their levels of engagement grow, so too will the strength of your employer brand. Existing employees will want to stay. And new people will seek you out for employment. So you progressively build a stronger, more loyal workforce. The underlying sums are simple. A happy, contented workforce means less churn and less recruitment, greater productivity, less sickness and a greater willingness to put more in.

So the bottom line is this: the resource implications of mobilising new contracts should not be underestimated. A focused leadership team with the correct level of technical and operational experience in mobilisation is crucial to generating client comfort and confidence. But so too is the need for the team to understand the human element; to have the ability to step into their stakeholders' shoes and see the world from their perspective; to listen and to communicate as widely as possible; to be open and honest, and lastly, to deliver on its promises.

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