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The Use of Career Anchors for Professional Staff During Change

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Abstract

The recent history of English Local Government has been one of, seemingly, continuous change. This change has brought about the compulsory redundancy of many thousands of staff or their early retirement from local government employment.

For those who have survived this period the stress, conflict and pressure associated with change has caused great emotional upset and loss of career opportunities. Certain aspects of the work and job environment though have been found to provide individuals with a feeling of security and well-being during change. Different aspects of the work and job environment provide this sense of security and well-being for different individuals.

This article explores the means by which professional staff employed in local government are surviving the change process. This exploration has determined which aspects of their job and work environment they have relied upon to provide them with support and security during change.

Introduction

Change has become a way of life in local government over the last twenty years, whether as a result of the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), Best Value, outsourcing or shared services development, the decentralisation or devolution of management responsibility, the delayering of council structures, or cost-cutting exercises (Allington and Morgan, 2002). Most individuals experiencing change, for whatever reason, find means to mitigate or reduce the stress and pressure associated with the ambiguity and uncertainty of change (Schein, 1978; Thomas and Pullen, 1999). Avoiding such stress and pressure can result in less resistance to change from those experiencing such processes (Kitchener, 1999). Sometimes these means are related to factors outside the job or workplace. Often though the means used relate directly to the job such individuals perform or the work environment in which they carry out their daily duties (Kirkpatrick, 1999). The means to mitigate or reduce the effects of change vary between individuals based on a number of factors, such as age and tenure. By identifying the means described above in relation to the factors described above, future change exercises may proceed, taking into consideration the requirements of staff of different ages and lengths of tenure. By ensuring that these requirements are met and that suitable opportunities are available to allow individuals to develop the means of mitigation, change may meet less resistance and as a result be more effective (Barton, 2002).

Change in Local Government

Following on from the implementation of Best Value and its review process local government has experienced a wave of outsourcing of services and strategic partnerships in service provision (Jervis and Richards, 1997). Some services have remained in-house in competition with commercial organisations under Best Value review (Pollitt, et. al, 1998). While others, such as the London Borough of Waltham Forest have made strategic partnership arrangements to take over and run services such as finance, IT, human resources, payroll and procurement (Kirkpatrick, 1999). Amey, one such partnership organisation has announced that it has secured a £112m public private partnership to deliver technology, finance and human resources services to West Berkshire Council (Keen and Scase, 1998). Amey has also been

chosen by Redcar and Cleveland Council as preferred bidder on a 10-year strategic partnership to take over the council's financial and accounting, information technology services, revenues and benefits and customer service. Amey, like Hyda Business Services, the strategic partners for Bedfordshire County Council, have dissolved their relationship with their respective council partners.

These 'strategic partners' and many more like them seek to profit from the contract with the council through the use of information technology to reduce costs, the use of different contract types to reduce employment costs, the development of management skills so that corporate services can become consultancy based, often working at a distance from the council in, perhaps, a call centre capacity (Allington and Morgan, 2002). All of these changes are at the very least unsettling to those staff directly affected and those who witness the change process (Barton, 2002).

The Impact of Change on Individual Behaviour

Changes, such as those described above, in both the work organisation and in technical aspects of the job itself, have meant that most people in local government have experienced considerable alteration in their working practices (Keen and Scase, 1998). To some these changes mean new opportunities and the possibility of advancement (McCalman and Paton, 1992). For others such change may cause them to feel threatened, and in effect, means a dismantling of the stable order of their lives (Laframboise, Nelson and Schmaltz, 2002). There are several different kinds of change, which can be put into four broad types of experience:

Imposition:-	where the initiative comes from someone else and new ways of working must meet outside requirements. Such a process undermines the sense of self-determination and control individuals desire from their work environment. New rules and laws such as CCT, Best Value and local government review are obvious examples of this phenomenon.
Adaptation:-	where individuals are required to change their behaviour or attitudes at the wish of others. Such behavioural or attitude change can be very difficult and can often lead to employee turnover if the individual cannot adapt to the new cultural requirements. An example of such change could be the taking on of a business orientation rather than a public service one, a requirement of individuals as part of the commercialisation of local government in the 1980s and 1990s (Laframboise, Nelson and Schmaltz, 2002).
Growth:-	where individuals are required to respond to opportunities for self-development, through, for example, acting up or job changes, an experience where personal competence may be challenged or tested.
Creativity:-	where each individual is the instigator of the change and in control of the process. Examples of this sort of change would be introducing new standards at work, developing a new technique or experimentation.
Schein 1978	

The experience of most people is that they will resist the first type of change situation, will be uncertain about the second, will be concerned but will try the third, and will enjoy the fourth kind of change (Rocco, Stein and Lee, 2001). It is a fact

though that the first two types of change are those most widely experienced by local government workers, and those explored in depth here (Keen and Scase, 1998).

Retaining Stability During Change

Schein (1978) developed an idea of stability zones for the work place, which he called "career anchors". Stability zones act as a crutch or support mechanism for those experiencing the uncertainty of change (Waters, Roach and Waters, 1976). Those fearing change can identify some aspect of their work environment, job or career which they value as a personal strength and which can be relied upon regardless of the uncertainty around them (Laframboise, Nelson and Schmaltz, 2002). This idea was developed to show that there are distinct categories of stability zone at work and that individuals can use them to evaluate themselves and their personal value through periods of transition and change. Schein (1978) believed that each individual will have one of the zones described below as the most important factor in their working lives:

managerial competence	the desire by some to seek out opportunities to manage and take responsibility
technical competence	for those who enjoy the technical/professional activity and existing skills
security	for those who desire job security, an assured income and pension as the foremost considerations in their work life
creativity	an important factor for those who want to build something of their own, such as a new process, theory, technique or product
autonomy and independence	where valuing freedom from constraints and evidencing individuality is the most important thing about work
Schein, 1978	

These factors are also described as strategies for keeping one's balance when there is a period of rapid and unsettling change, since for many, achieving these factors is a long-term goal of trying to keep something stable (Thomas, 1980).

Age and Tenure as Factors in the Gaining Stability Process.

The strategies described above will be of greater or lesser relevance at different stages in an individuals career and at different periods of an individuals tenure in his or her employing organisation (London, 1993). Raelin (1985) identified age and tenure as two interrelated individual factors that directly affect the professionals response and adaption to the organisational environment and culture. Older workers develop strong work values, which cause an appreciation of the realities and benefits of consistency and security in the work environment (Cherrington, Spencer and England, 1979). This appreciation is not always shared with those younger members of the organisation.

Raelin (1985) also identified that older workers were less inclined to absence and turnover and identified themselves more with management and its policies. This in itself suggests greater compliance mixed with a perception of skills redundancy and a lack of marketability in a job search outside the employing organisation. Mangione (1973), Porter and Steers (1973, 1987) and Price (1977), Mobley et al (1978)., Waters et al. (1976) amongst others found tenure to be a reliable predictor of

turnover and one of the single best indicators even during times of change. The employees with the lowest tenure in the organisation are those most likely to leave, partly because they can, their skills being of marketable quality. Those in mid-life, forty years of age or over, are of particular interest as many of this studies survey respondents fall within what Schein (1978) defined as the middle career band. He stated this is the, "broad band, lasting as long as twenty years or more, between being reviewed for tenure and being considered...or considering early retirement". Schein (1978) and Yarnall (1998) identify this stage as one where employees seek to establish an organisational identity, through a process where the individual reviews his or her job role and title. If these are unclear due to change or ambiguity from another source, he or she will focus their energy elsewhere than the confused role they are forced to play, Katz (1976) says that 'elsewhere' could be extrinsic factors such as pay, benefits and the work environment (see also Roberts, 2001). Thomas (1980) sees this mid-career evaluation of achievements versus career expectations, as a precursor of re-prioritisation of personal and organisational commitment. This process can lead to dissatisfaction with workplace achievements, and the desire to change career or job or concentrate on family, social life, or other outside work interests (Marshall and Bonner, 2003).

As individuals age the importance to them of different aspects (e.g. job involvement, job characteristics, job satisfaction and rewards) of their work and career, change. Intrinsic job satisfactions were more related to work performance, for younger rather than older employees although this contention is questioned as older workers are more interested than younger employees in intrinsic work opportunities (Marshall and Bonner, 2003). These older workers, in the main, seem to enjoy overall job satisfaction and certain extrinsic factors such as pay, good relationship with managers, those of a superior organisational status, and organisational policies, practices and procedures (Rocco, Stein and Lee, 2001). Katz (1976) found that job characteristics have more impact on younger employees than older ones, although in his later study of career stage and job satisfaction, he found overall job satisfaction to be unrelated to career stage (see also Katz, 1978).

Methodology

A questionnaire was issued to local government employees across shire district, county, metropolitan, unitary and London Borough Councils. This questionnaire asked the respondents to give:

- (i) one of the listed job characteristics, or a career anchor identified by the research carried out by Schein (1978) (or suggest another job characteristic) that they perceive to be important for them to receive from the organisation as a stability zone during change; and,
- (ii) a work characteristic which they wished to experience, (or suggest another) particularly at times of change.

Each respondent was asked to inform the questionnaire whether it was their intention to leave their current employment within a year of answering as a measure of their commitment to the organization. The intention to leave an organization was considered to be a strong influence on the individuals response to these questions. An individual prone to leave the organization, it was considered, may show different needs with regard to organisational change than those employees wishing to remain.

Details of the Survey and Interview Group

The survey consisted of a postal questionnaire sent to professionally qualified staff in local government identified as senior managers or professionals through the Municipal Handbook. These individuals were contacted before hand and their participation agreed. Their demographic profiles were noted and the group used were representative of the gender, race and age profile for senior managers within local government.

The group consisted of 207 men (79.3 per cent) and 54 women (20.7 per cent) of whom 170 men (65.13 per cent) and 47 women (18 per cent) identified themselves as intending to stay in their employing council, while 37 men (14.2 per cent) and 7 women (16.9 per cent) committed themselves to leaving their employing council.

Tenure/Age	<30 years	30-40 years	40-50 years	>50 years	Total
6 months	2	1	2	0	5 (2.9%)
6-12 months	0	4	0	1	5 (2.9%)
< 2 years	0	5	6	0	11 (6.5%)
2-5 years	0	21	21	3	45 (26.5%)
> 5 years	0	20	67	17	104 (61.2%)
Total	2	51	96	21	170

The table above shows that the majority of men intending to stay with their employing council are over 40 years of age and have more than 5 years tenure.

Tenure/Age	<30 years	30-40 years	40-50 years	>50 years	Total
6 months	0	3	0	0	3 (6.4%)
6-12 months	0	2	0	0	2 (4.2%)
< 2 years	0	3	0	0	3 (6.4%)
2-5 years	1	5	8	0	14 (29.8%)
> 5 years	0	12	8	5	25 (53.2%)
Total	1	25	16	5	47

The table above shows that the majority of women intending to stay with their employing council are between 30 and 50 years age of whom 75 per cent have more than 5 years tenure.

Tenure/Age	<30 years	30-40 years	40-50 years	>50 years	Total
6 months	0	0	0	0	0
6-12 months	0	1	0	0	1 (2.7%)
< 2 years	0	1	0	0	1 (2.7%)
2-5 years	0	8	5	0	13 (31.1%)
> 5 years	0	6	15	1	22 (59.5%)
Total	0	16	20	1	37

The table above shows that the majority of men not intending to stay with their employing council are in the 40-50 age bracket and have more than 5 years tenure.

Tenure/Age	<30 years	30-40 years	40-50 years	>50 years	Total
6 months	0	0	0	0	0
6-12 months	0	0	0	0	0
< 2 years	0	1	0	0	1 (14%)
2-5 years	1	2	0	0	4 (57%)
> 5 years	0	1	2	0	2 (29%)
Total	1	4	2	0	7

The table above shows that the majority of women not intending to stay with their employing council are in the 30-40 age bracket and have less than 5 years tenure.

Age/Tenure	< 40 years of age	> 40 years of age	Total Leavers
< 5 years tenure	12(27.3%)	6(13.6%)	(18)(40.1%)
> 5 years tenure	8(18.2%)	18(40.9%)	(26)(59.9%)
Total Numbers	20	24	44
Total Per Cent	45.5%	54.5%	100%

The table above shows that the majority of women and men not intending to stay with their employing council are in the 40+ age group and have more than 5 years tenure.

Age/Tenure	< 40 years of age	> 40 years of age	Total Stayers
< 5 years tenure	50(23.5%)	40(18.4%)	(90) 41.5%
> 5 years tenure	29(13.4%)	97(44.7%)	(126) 58.5%
Total Numbers	79	138	217
Total Per Cent	36.4%	63.6%	100%

Similarly, the table above shows that the majority of men and women intending to stay with their employing council are in the 40+ age group and have more than 5 years tenure.

Results and Findings

The tables set out below show by age and tenure those job and work characteristics which individuals seek during times of change as they offer the prospect of security and stability. While each group was able to pick from the same list of stability factors, the option was given that each individual could suggest a different source of security. Contributions offered in addition to those stability zones listed were comparatively few and tended to be out of work solutions to change such as family, hobby, social or religious support areas.

Career Anchors for Staff Group of 40 years of age and over 5 years tenure

More than 40 years of age more than 5 years service - Top three most important work needs.

Leavers	Stayers
Job Satisfaction	Job Satisfaction
Good Pay	Job Security
Challenging Work	Challenging Work

More than 40 years of age more than 5 years service - Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Contribute	Contribute
Inter-relate well	Staff problems.
No work problems	Appropriate rewards

At the most senior level this group seem to prize the same key features job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The leavers and Stayers exchange dedication and loyalty (the contribution measure) for job security and appreciation. The leavers place pay above security although the obvious need to avoid conflict recorded by the measures no work problems and relate well suggest that they are seeking to avoid conflict situations. The fact that stayers are concerned with staff problems suggests that they too seek to avoid conflict, however, their job security seems of too great an importance for them to seek avoidance of this issue by leaving. In many respects the orientation of these stayers seems to lean towards a combination of getting secure and getting balanced judging by their interest in external non-work related satisfiers. The fear of career plateauing for both leavers and stayers may have produced an awareness of personal dysfunction, which has caused these group members to seek challenging work situations.

More than 40 years of age less than 5 years service - Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Job Satisfaction	Job Satisfaction
Good Pay	Challenging Work
Challenging Work	Job Security

More than 40 years of age less than 5 years service - Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Contribute	Contribute
Appropriate Rewards	Staff problems
Inter-personal problems	Freedom to organise

This group of shorter tenure over 40's have more interest, amongst the leavers, in pay and rewards which may supply the motivation to turnover. As with the previous group the challenge of work still maintains a high position which perhaps reinforces the decision to leave if opportunities for challenge are not available in current employment. The lack of promotion or merit promotion measures amongst this groups highest needs suggests perhaps that they seek career-centred opportunities away from bureaucratic restraint such as the getting high orientation describes although the absence of an autonomy measure amongst the most needed features also calls this into question. Job security is still a major item for the stayer suggesting perhaps that the need to be secure is again the clearest description of this group's orientation.

Less than 40 years of age more than 5 years service -Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Job Security	Job Satisfaction
Job Satisfaction.	Job Security.
Challenging Work	Challenging Work.

Less than 40 years of age more than 5 years service -Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Contribute	Contribute
No work problems	Appropriate rewards
Inter-relate well	Staff problems

Once again job security and job satisfaction feature in the top three most important work features revealing a very similar profile to that of the oldest longest serving group with the exchange of good pay for job security. Obviously this group most of all both stayer and leaver rate security as most important work feature as they seek to establish their professional and organisational identity. The local government review and CCT are concerns which affect this group more than those older, senior legal officers, who are established in their organisational role. Job satisfaction is probably more related to organisational performance for this age group that those senior which must cause concerns for this group during times of change and conflict especially when alternative equitable job opportunities seem scarce and the future is uncertain.

Less than 40 years of age less than 5 years service -Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Job Satisfaction	Job Satisfaction
Job Security	Challenging Work
Good Boss	Job Security

Less than 40 years of age less than 5 years service -Top three most important work features.

Leavers	Stayers
Contribute	Contribute
No work problems	Appropriate rewards
Appropriate rewards	Staff problems

For leavers having a good boss features prominently, which suggests that failure to secure a good relationship with their current manager may have caused the initial lack of job satisfaction. Security features highly for both groups although challenging work replaces good boss amongst the stayers who are obviously able to concentrate of intrinsic aspects of their job. The second sheet most important features are the same for both leavers and stayers although seperately ordered. The reveal an on-going concern amongst these groups with appropriate pay, probably in comparison with their private sector comparaters, a possible cause of dissatisfaction, and conflict with junior staff.

Discussion

There appears to be little difference between the attitudes adopted towards stabilizing factors during change between the different age and tenure groups of employed professionals involved in this study. These responses are a reflection of the situation in which professional staff in local government find themselves, with a limited range of options to how they might react to change in their work environment.

Those respondents that reported feeling more committed to the organization report that, in the majority, they do so because they have adopted a view to the new mode of service delivery in order that they should aligns themselves with service managers in the pursuit of service objectives. By being seen as useful and not a blockage to service managers intentions they intend to remain in the councils employment as long as possible. Often terming themselves as 'business partners' the professional advisers seek to shape the views of service managers and become indispensable to them as both knowledge based supporters and as corporate friends. Some strategies have developed though amongst central department staff, such as taking over aspects of the service managers role, on occasion leading on some aspects of the managers job role where their particular skills and expertise far outweigh those of the manager. The interview findings also reveal a deeply held belief amongst many professional staff that their skills are even more relevant to the changing work environment, a view that they promulgate, to ensure that they are supported by the service managers against any attempt to dispense with their services on-site.

Age and Tenure as Factors in Changing Career Anchors

Mangione (1973), Porter and Steers (1973) and Price (1977), Mobley et al (1980), Waters et al. (1976) amongst others found tenure to be a reliable predictor of turnover and one of the single best indicators. The results of the study show that employees with the lowest tenure in the organisation are those most likely to leave.

The findings of this study reflect to some extent those of many other studies carried out into the different attitudes to work exhibited by individuals at different stages in their careers. Especially those studies which have shown that professional, white-

collar subjects and public servants exhibit specific career needs in mid-career and late career.

The respondents to this study are mostly in mid-life, forty years of age or over, which Schein (1978) defined as the middle career band. The broad band of time, lasting as long as twenty years or more, is the time when career needs are being reviewed and tenure considered. During periods of change this time of life and career stage can be one of turmoil and even crisis in terms of self development and organisational issues. Essentially, this turmoil can lead to a decision between specialisation or generalisation in career terms, a choice between staying in the profession as a lifelong technical expert or risking technical obsolescence by entering general management.

The move into management offers wider potential for further career advancement, although it can produce role ambiguity and dissatisfaction.

Some employees at the later career stage seek to establish an organisational identity, through a process where he or she reviews his or her job role and title and zones of reassurance and stability. This mid-career evaluation of achievements and zones of stability can conflict with career expectations, and cause a subsequent re-prioritisation of job, career and organisational commitment. Often this process can lead to dissatisfaction with achievements, and career or job turnover, and result in concerns over the absence or weakness of career stability.

As individuals age the importance to them of different aspects (e.g. job involvement, job characteristics, job satisfaction and rewards) of their work and career as stability zones, change. It has been found that intrinsic job satisfaction related to work performance, is more important for younger rather than older employees but (Raelin, 1985). Older workers can be interested in intrinsic work opportunities even though their stability zones may more often be overall job satisfaction and certain extrinsic factors such as pay, good relationship with managers, those of a superior organizational status, and organisational policies, practices and procedures. Job satisfaction increases at each career stage as does the individuals involvement in work, and pride in work skills, features which provide potential stability zones.

Managing change

The stability zones identified above can be used to help people cope with change we also have to manage change at work through the development of a planned process. Such a process ensures that change exercises are managed carefully, a plan which can be shared with those involved from the beginning.

These stability zones, therefore, can be identified with the individual concerned and, if possible, within the change process, they can be reinforced, during consultation. If the stability zone cannot be reinforced in the organisational change process they might be able to be reinforced in a career context. Below is a change process plan which provides the context and framework for introducing stability zones.

Step	Change Process	Objective to be achieved
1	Establish the project	Agree as far as possible agree the overall objectives of the change project to be achieved with the staff concerned. Identify the timescale for achieving the objectives and milestones along the way. Market to those in the change process the need for change and pro-actively pursue their ideas and their involvement.
2	Set goals	Agree goals or milestones which depict progress in the change process with and for all those involved. Agree way of showing progress towards immediate, mid-way and long-term goals so that it can be monitored and staff kept aware.
3	Identify a solution	Identify means to deal with blockages so that they can be addressed and removed by consultation and agreement.
4	Prepare for implementing	Identify what resources are needed so that stress, work overload and job ambiguity are minimised and so that everyone knows where in the change process they are at any one time
5	Implement the project	Planning with those affected the implementation, influencing those involved so that fear is reduced and that the unexpected is dealt with calmly
6	Review progress	Keep everyone informed on progress against the plan good and bad aspects of the change to maintain trust and momentum throughout the process. Report on reviews of progress to all and encourage meaningful consultation and exchange both positive and negative and engage those involved in the exercise
7	Maintain the project	Involve everyone in problem-solving so that the project momentum is maintained through mutual co-operation in achieving its set objectives. Report openly on progress towards those objectives and should those objectives change in part or whole involve all involved in consultation on the why and where of the changes

This sort of change plan is useful as a checklist to prepare for change the important point is that ownership of such a change project by the staff involved builds and develops over time. It makes sense to give a firm push at the beginning of a project, stage 1, to ensure that it really gets started and a sense of progress is achieved. That is also the stage where dialogue begins with staff about their part in the change programme and there is identification through questionnaire of their stability zone.

Those staff who are risk of major change in their work role or even at risk of job loss should be identified by stage 5 the implementation stage.

It is also important to offer help and support to staff after the initial planning stage, sharing with all involved how everyone is involved and why and how the plan will take into account group and individual stability zone needs within the context of change.

Keeping Something Stable in a Period of Change

For a satisfactory outcome during change there needs to be consideration to the individual needs of staff for comfort and stability. Where there is no stability zones provided, none of the individuals involved in the change process, even those who retain their jobs, will maintain their level of commitment to the organisation. The stress experienced during change exercises with all the associated feelings of increased ambiguity and the possibility of job loss, can alienate staff, but people can cope with a great deal of change, pressure, complexity and confusion if at least one area of our lives is relatively stable. Staff can rely on this stable part of their work lives and so risk change elsewhere, but if nothing is stable, everything becomes turmoil.

The principle stability zones identified in this study can be supported through change in a number of ways:-

Job Security

1. Support for continuous professional/personal development so that the individual and move up, and if necessary for a limited period, down the organisational hierarchy and prepare if needs be for different roles within the organisation.
2. Career development by the individual and the organisation maintaining and developing the individual's skills base and widening their skills to increase their 'marketability' within the organisation and outside it.
3. A working redeployment programme to move surplus staff to other areas of the organisation into jobs requiring comparable skills
4. Partnership agreements with organisations employing staff with similar/same skills so that surplus staff can be transferred in times of change in need be.

Job Satisfaction

1. Identify which aspects of the individual's job provides satisfaction, intrinsic or extrinsic and prepare information on those aspects of the change process which will increase or decrease that satisfaction. If, for example, layering is the objective of the change then their might be opportunities for greater empowerment or a wider range of duties increasing the person's skill base.
2. Ensure all individuals involved in change understand the need for change in relation to their job and work role so that it is apparent how the change will improve their job satisfaction or at least will not harm it.

Contribution to the Organisation

1. Ensure all individuals involved in change understand the need for change in relation to their job and work role so that it is apparent to them how the change will improve their ability to make a contribution to the organisation or at least will not harm it.
2. Sell the ethos behind the change exercise and how it will reduce costs, improve organisational performance, improve the quality of services to ensure that all staff affected by the change understand and support the need for change in relation to their job and work role. Support staff in supporting the change and assimilating the new ethos so that it is apparent to them how the change will improve their ability to make a contribution to the organisation or at least will not harm it.

Conclusion

The most obvious approach that an HR practitioner can take in preparing for a change exercise is to plan the event carefully taking into account not just statutory requirements such as consultation periods with staff but also the hidden psychological issues such as the effect of change on staff. In this regard, the HR lead must plan to ensure that those involved in the change exercise have clear stability zones set out for them.

The careful preparation of change including the identification and publication to all affected staff of plans to protect stability zones will prove effective in maintaining organizational performance and reduce voluntary turnover during change exercises.

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