

# Changing Skill Mix A Recipe for Success

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# Introduction

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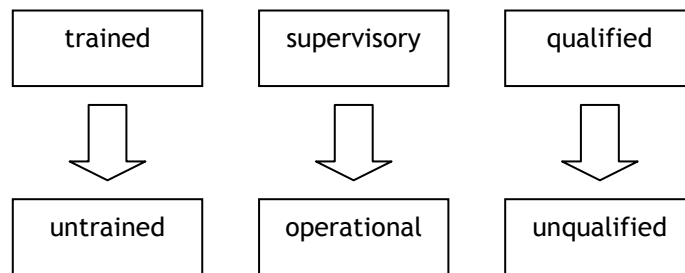
## What is skill mix?

This report outlines key aspects of the changing skill mix agenda which has been witnessed in recent years, particularly in the public sector, as part of workforce modernisation. The private sector has also been involved in changing the skill mix of its staff, more often through creating a more flexibly skilled workforce.

The term 'skill mix' encompasses descriptions such as substitution, workforce remodelling, multi-skilling, workforce redesign, task or functional flexibility. All these terms refer to altering the skill component of jobs within an organisation and moving work between different groups of staff. Some of these terms have their origins in manpower planning; others are derived from concepts like the 'flexible firm'.

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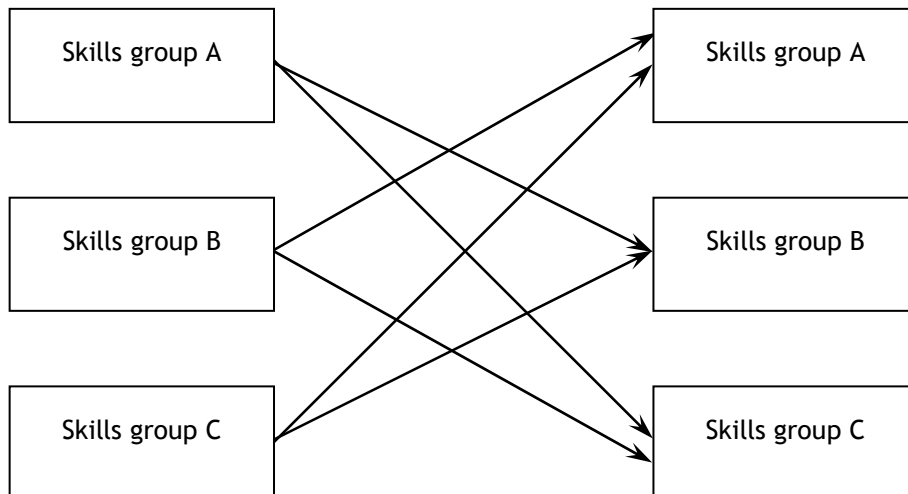
**Figure 1: Big transfers of work seen between different groups of staff**



Source: IES, 2006

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**Figure 2: Multi-skilling in practice: movement of skills**



Source: IES, 2006

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These skill transfers can be vertical or horizontal in nature. Vertical skill transfers can be in both directions: the movement of low skill tasks to lower level or 'new' jobs and covering work at higher grade levels. By contrast, horizontal transfers encompass the

movement of skills and knowledge between peers, for example through functional flexibility. Functional flexibility involves the breaking down of traditional barriers between different areas of work (functions) within a business so one member of staff is able to perform a number of tasks outside their function. Creating a truly multi-skilled workforce is the fullest expression of functional flexibility. A more limited form can be seen in task flexibility where employees can do a broader number of activities than previously, but within their own work area.

## Why are skill mix initiatives undertaken?

Skill mix initiatives are launched for a variety of reasons, to:

- use resources cost effectively by ensuring that the right skills at the right price are being deployed to achieve an optimum result, including more flexible and timely response to organisational needs
- improve staff motivation through offering
  - new skills
  - the loss of unwelcome work
  - reduced working hours
- aid recruitment through:
  - better job branding
  - more professional status
- help retention by providing more satisfying work
- improve career paths by creating a ladder of opportunities
- facilitate better cover arrangements
- encourage teamworking through better task definition and emphasis on the inter-connectivity of activities
- develop superior process management by critically looking at the links in the service chain.

Thus there are supply and demand reasons for changing skill mix. The tight labour market of recent years has encouraged employers to think of ways of making work more attractive and marketing that to prospective candidates. Keeping staff in this situation is also more challenging and either job enrichment or the stripping out of tedious tasks is likely to improve staff satisfaction.

From the other direction, pressures to cut costs have led organisations to think about how services could be provided more cheaply. There is also a customer service driver: being more responsive to customer need has been an ever growing aim of organisations

from all sectors. This can be achieved through functional flexibility (enhancing the speed of problem solving) and having staff whose primary job it is to deliver particular services (not an unwelcome addition to a task list). The example below gives some idea of the potential of multi-skilling – one form of changing skill mix.

*'British Airports Authority at Glasgow Airport suffered from an average 53 hours of downtime when equipment failed, partly because of the need to wait for more than one trade to attend a problem. Now, through multi-skilling, response and repair times have fallen such that downtime is averaging four hours per incident.'*

Pollock 2000

## Methodology

To discover more about the practical implementation and the outcomes of workforce re-design programmes a literature review was undertaken and a number of interviews were carried out with stakeholders within different public sectors and the private sector. Through the literature review and interviews, evidence was gathered and more information about the changes that were occurring and their impacts on the workplace. For each sector, where possible, two interviews were conducted to get an idea of the policy perspective and the perspective of those working on the ground eg head teachers and/or staff.

Interviews were held with those working in education, social work (encompassing mental health and children's services), NHS, the Prison Service and the Police. The private sector example was Lloyds TSB.

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# Outcomes of Changing Skill Mix

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The following sections outline each of the key outcomes which emerged from the research with examples to illustrate the issues associated with them. As stated earlier, these results are based on two perspectives from each of the sectors interviewed and therefore provide an insight, not an in-depth analysis, of changing skill mix in practice.

## Definition of new / changed roles

For some, the outcome of workforce redesign within their organisation was a better definition of staff roles, whereas for others it had resulted in a blurring of boundaries between support and professional roles. This blurring of boundaries could be an issue as it could result in tensions between professional and support staff; a perception of 'stepping on each other's toes'.

Within the education sector it was stated that the workforce remodelling agenda had clearly outlined where the division was between the support staff and professional role. It was felt that changing the skill mix had resulted in roles which were better defined and as a result more effective:

*'Remodelling has led to clearer roles with proper job descriptions and accountability should be clearer.'*

Education, practitioner

It was also the case with police investigation that the civilian support role of Investigating Officer was clearly defined, as any duties they could undertake, such as taking witness statements, required the granting of designated powers to the individuals involved. Owing to legal requirements the range of activities undertaken by Investigating Officers has to be understood by all in the force, so this is not a source of conflict.

Our interviews in social work (mental health and children's services) highlighted that a blurring of boundaries between professionals and support staff was an issue in this sector:

*'It can become clouded where the barriers between what a social worker is needed for and what a professional assistant can do.'*

Social work, local level policy practitioner

The reasons for these different perceptions about the boundaries between the roles may also be because in the education sector the degree of overlap was smaller, this was shown by some research carried out recently for the ESRC (Kessler *et al*, 2005). In the report produced the researchers stated that:



*'...the degree of overlap in education appeared markedly less than in social care or healthcare.'*

Kessler et al, 2005: p.11

The difference in role overlap between education and social work is likely to be partly a result of the initiative in the education sector, in comparison to social work, being driven and supported by a more coherent set of drivers. The changes in the education sector benefited from a more nationally co-ordinated approach. This included a national agreement which laid out where the boundary should be between the roles, and the creation of the Training and Development Agency for Schools-Development (formerly the National Remodelling Team) which provided support to schools implementing the changes.

Further, before 'workforce remodelling', teaching assistant roles still existed, however they were not so well defined because there was no national definition of what duties support staff should undertake. The signing in 2003 of 'National Agreement: Raising Standards and Tackling Workload' by teachers, government and unions (except NUT), set out which tasks should be removed from teachers and given to support staff (see Box 2 for ways the skill mix within schools has been altered).

**Box 2: Two ways the skill mix within schools has been altered**

1. Teachers used to do administration connected to exams. This responsibility has recently been removed from teachers at one school interviewed and a new administration role has been created the job description of which is to carry out these tasks.
2. Tasks such as putting up displays are now undertaken by teaching assistants.

Source: interviews with stakeholders in the education sector

The degree to which roles are clearly defined in practice, and how great an issue the blurring of boundaries between roles is going to be, is likely to be influenced by the sector itself and the robustness of the change management process implemented. Ultimately the manager in charge, whether it be a prison governor, headteacher or senior social worker, is also likely to be very influential in ensuring roles are defined accurately and adequately. Arguably some senior managers may exploit the role ambiguity to push out the boundaries of what lower level (and thereby cheaper) staff can do.

## Outcomes for professionals

There were two key outcomes for professionals that were evident in this research. One was the extent to which stress and 'burn out' were issues: some suggesting they were a source of stress, whereas for others the new roles decreased stress. Linked to this, was that overall job satisfaction of professionals appears to have increased as a result of altering their skill mix.

There was concern within social work that focusing professional's workload around their core professional duties could lead to 'burn out'. Professionals would no longer have any time away from stressful situations to 'relax' whilst attending meetings or sorting through paperwork. The same argument has been made for prison officers.

However, findings from research conducted for the ESRC (Kessler *et al.*, 2005) suggests that assistants in the social work, education and health sectors are not merely confined to routine and low-skill tasks, but they are also taking on tasks which had previously been undertaken exclusively by professionals. The degree to which tasks previously confined solely to professionals are undertaken by assistants varies between the sectors. It happens to a lesser extent in education. This point links back to the issue of the blurring of boundaries between roles mentioned earlier. Although this blurring can heighten tensions between the roles, as stated above, it can also prevent professionals becoming burnt out if some of their more stressful workload is shared with support staff. This effect, of course, can only occur where it is the more stressful, not mundane, tasks that are transferred. Teachers may be relieved to lose playground duty, but the loss of photocopying may provide minimal benefit.

Thus, it is both the nature, as well as the number, of tasks moved from professionals to support staff that appears to be needed to prevent 'burn out', whilst ensuring boundaries between the roles are not unduly blurred. Clearly, how this balance is struck will be sector specific.

However, new roles have been created with a skill mix that differs from that of the traditional role, which can reduce stress. For example, the Emergency Care Practitioner role within the NHS (see Box 3) can reduce stress as it allows staff to move between highly stressful areas of work, such as urgent care centres, and less stressful areas. This is detailed in the following:

*'Staff traditionally find that working in urgent care centres is very stressful. The ECP role allows staff to rotate between this environment, responding to 999 calls and undertaking primary care home visits, which has proven to assist in reducing stress levels and improve moral.'*

Department of Health, 2004: p.6/7

### **Box 3: Emergency Care Practitioners (ECPs)**

ECPs were introduced into the health service on a pilot basis to help with the increase in emergency and unscheduled care, necessitating new models of service delivery. Against this background, the NHS is seeking 'a flexible workforce and a flexible approach to skill mix - breaking down professional and traditional boundaries'. This is in order to ensure that patients receive the best possible care, by an appropriately trained person, in the best way possible. The rubric of this modernisation drive is to provide patients with 'the right skill at the right time in the right place'.

ECPs respond to emergency calls, support GPs in their out of hours service and work in urgent care centres. Their effectiveness is shown by a 40 per cent reduction in referrals to Accident and

Emergency when performing a paramedic role and more than halving the response time compared with GPs in out of hours work. ECPs are cheaper to employ than paramedics.

ECPs are drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds and this is seen to benefit service provision. They have to achieve a common set of 'primary competencies', but specific competencies need to be added to meet local service requirements.

Source: The Emergency Care Practitioner report, published by the Modernisation Agency/  
Department of Health, 2004

Ultimately, a key part of overall job satisfaction for professionals depends upon on how stress is managed in the new or changed roles. It would seem that anecdotal evidence within the education sector supports the view that increased job satisfaction is derived from reduced stress and a better work life balance. From research conducted for the ESRC teachers, social workers and nurses felt that assistants helped to ease their workload and had a positive impact on their role. However, there were still concerns about the extent to which support staff could successfully take on professional duties and some were concerned about the additional pressure of 'managing' these assistants. Again such concerns are likely to be greater in situations where role ambiguity exists or where the transfer of work is contested – for example where it is felt that 'assistants' are insufficiently trained.

## Outcomes for support staff/multi-skilled staff

This section addresses the outcomes highlighted by support staff or assistants and multi-skilled staff within the private sector. Issues here concerned pay, whether levels were correct in light of new responsibilities, whether training was sufficient to ensure the additional/ new roles could be performed adequately, and career prospects.

In the education sector it seems that career prospects and pay had improved as a result of the changes. Further, adequate training was provided to ensure support staff could fulfil their new duties. However, pay was still an issue. The findings from a focus group with teaching assistants indicated that pay had improved with the duties expected, but that 'rewards still don't match the job' (education, policy practitioner).

At Lloyds TSB, career prospects and pay were not particularly mentioned, but this example does highlight the importance of training (see Box 4 for the changing role of staff within Lloyds TSB). From a policy perspective it was stated that training should be implemented so that staff could perform all functions required, which would positively be to their benefit, as it would increase their skill set. From staff interviews it appears that they enjoyed the opportunity to become multi-skilled as it increased the variety of tasks they performed. This increased variety of tasks is likely to lead to the need for additional training. Changing the skill mix can enrich a job, but if it is not fully implemented it may have a negative effect. The provision of training is necessary to have a positive effect on staff, and the role of the line manager in organising or sanctioning that training is critical.

#### Box 4: The changing role of staff within Lloyds TSB

Examples of how they were altering the skill mix amongst their staff:

- Task or functional flexibility - multi-skilled staff able to perform variety of functions within a branch or processing centre.
- Aiming at interchangeability of staff.
- Separated specialist areas of work such as processing, customer service/ sales orientated and receiving incoming calls.
- Some emphasis on core professional duties. In-branch administrative tasks such as opening post and checking till sheets are being delegated away from back-office managers to customer service officers. This is to allow back-office managers to focus more on sales orientated work such as renewing and upgrading accounts.

Technological advancement has been a key facilitator of change. It has enabled the breakdown of technical barriers between functions so staff can become multi-skilled. Further, as all information can now be stored on a computer which can be accessed from anywhere, businesses such as Lloyds TSB are able to move certain tasks, for example answering incoming calls, away from branches to call centres.

Source: interviews with staff at Lloyds TSB

Another issue linked to job satisfaction was career progression. In social work there was concern that career progression did not exist for some of the new roles and/or sufficient training was not provided. This issue is highlighted by the following quote:

*'Mental health does need more psychologists and you can make a case for a two-tier profession. But ad hoc solutions don't work. You need something properly organised with proper training and progression between the two-tiers.'*

Social work, practitioner

This issue of career progression relates to the perception that support roles which are emerging could act as a 'taster' or 'stepping stone' into sectors. It seems that quite often such roles did indeed provide an insight into what the role of a qualified social worker, police officer or teacher is like and therefore are a positive outcome of workforce redesign. However, further progress was dependent naturally on the aspirations of the individual, but also on the organisational context. In some sectors, transfers have been discouraged. In others, the extent to which they happen is down to the encouragement of their managers, though sometimes HR played a helpful role. This leaves it up to the altruism of the manager. For example, head teachers might not want their teaching assistants to become teachers as this means they lose them in the short term while they qualify. Career transitions are likely to be most effective where movement is seen to be positively beneficial to the organisation. For example, the Prison Service has recognised that the move from 'other support grade' (OSG) to prison officer can be an effective recruitment method.

If support staff are not progressing to the next level because they do not aspire to, then this is not necessarily a problem as far as career progression or job satisfaction are concerned. Nonetheless it may be an issue if the aim of the changing skill mix agenda is to 'grow their own' professionals in order to compensate for a shortage in the labour market. In these instances, there is a need to focus on the recruitment process and selection criteria before the problem can be resolved.

Where a perceived lack of opportunity to progress frustrates ambitions, this can have a detrimental impact on job satisfaction. This may be truer where managerial obstruction is the cause rather than the lack of structures to support this movement. The latter may have systemic rather than local causes. The lack of progression opportunity may be linked to how well the programme of reform is embedded. For example, workforce remodelling in the education sector is a much more coherent and national programme than emerged from our social work interviews, resulting in better structures for progression. This point, however, can be overstated. Evidence from research conducted for the ESRC suggests that assistants in social work were more likely, in comparison to teaching assistants, to view their role as a stepping stone into the profession.

Ultimately, however much it might be the intention nationally to encourage career progression, this can be frustrated by a head or team leader. Equally though, individual schools or local authorities can make career progression a realistic goal. The local impact is much more likely to be felt in areas such as social work and health, rather than education, because the roles are much broader, not as tightly defined nationally.

## Outcomes for service users/customers

Improving service user and customer experience was often one of the rationales for modernising/re-designing the workforce. However views on whether the changes had succeeded in this tended to differ depending on whether it was viewed from a policy or staff perspective. There were also some sector differences.

Within teaching, an improved service for students was stated as being an outcome:

*'...standards have risen as a result of their [teachers] being able to focus more on teaching and learning and the children being exposed to a greater variety of activity.'*

Education, policy practitioner

However, it was not always easy to measure success in improving standards because the presence of unrelated factors affected the outcome. Nonetheless, there were situations where the benefits were clear cut, such as in the enriching experience offered to students by specialist teaching assistants in music and physical education.

In social work there was also an example of a more enriching provision being offered to service users as a result of altering the skill mix. This occurred through the introduction of STAR workers (see Box 5).

**Box 5: STAR workers (support, time and recovery workers) introduced in mental health**

These are people who have had or are concurrently service users and their role is to work with patients and provide help and support with immediate issues such as housing and debt problems which do not require a qualified health or social care professional.

Source: interview with mental health practitioner

It was recognised that a mix of staff was beneficial:

*'...we know that helping people is not just about doctors and that we need people to work at different levels.'*

Mental health, practitioner

However, there was also concern within social work and in particular mental health, that, although a more enriching provision was being provided by new roles such as STAR workers, using assistants to take on professionals roles could harm the service provided. This concern was described earlier in terms of professional fears that the right balance with non-professionals might not be achieved. From the service users' perspective there was a risk of delivering a poorer service if support staff replaced professionals on a one for one basis.

Another key outcome was that service users found assistants within the education, social work and health sectors easier to relate to. This was because the individuals in these roles were often more representative of the community they were linked to, in comparison to the professionals, and because these roles tended to spend more time with service users. Also they were perceived to be 'less daunting'; this was particularly true for police support workers. However, this perception could also lead to issues of authority according to a finding from research conducted for the ESRC (Kessler et al.; 2005):

*'This closeness and informality can generate dangers for the assistant. It can undermine their credibility and encourage a lack of respect.'*

Kessler et al, 2005: p.14

In the financial industry it has been documented that functional flexibility has come about in order to improve customer service: 'another pressure for change has been improvement to the quality of customer service' (Reilly, 2000). The aim is to make life easier for the customer by having all their queries dealt with by one person. This is exactly what Lloyds TSB have done. They have sought to ensure that all their staff within a branch, call centre or processing centre can handle all queries which customers bring to them. As a consequence, some branches have also delegated a number of tasks away from back-office managers onto customer service officers. This has been done to allow back-office managers to focus more on sales orientated work. However, to ensure that customer service standards are upheld, organisations within this sector undertaking these types of skill mix changes, need to ensure that this

delegation is adequately managed, sales and customer service needs are balanced, and additional staff are taken on if required.

To summarise, customer and service user needs are often at the forefront of workforce redesign initiatives. Overall these needs are met with an enriched and customer focused provision. However, as mentioned previously, it seems that roles need to be properly defined to prevent lower skilled staff being used when professional input is required. Further, as illustrated by the private sector example, it appears that customer needs must be continually balanced with other organisational priorities.

## Organisational outcomes

There were two key organisational outcomes in altering the skill mix: improved efficiency and cost effects. Opinion was divided over whether costs were saved or increased.

Improvement in efficiency through the more effective use of staff was a key goal of skill mix initiatives, and was found across the sectors.

*'...efficiency gains for the customer...improve the end-to-end process.'*

Lloyds TSB, HR personnel

Perceptions on cost outcomes varied with the experiences of the interviewee and the perspective from which they saw skill mix at work. Practitioners tended to focus on the short-term expense of training staff to fulfil the new roles, and there were also concerns about the cost of the transition period. By contrast, policy colleagues focused more on the medium- to long-term gains of making better use of staff.

Social work and the police were very impressed with the cost savings. To meet the shortage of social workers, a county council either had to employ agency staff or they could re-design and re-focus social work roles to ensure professionals were only used when really required. All other tasks could be performed by 'professional assistants'. Re-defining the role of the social worker was clearly the more cost effective route, given the relative payroll costs of the two groups. (See Box 6 for the ways in which social workers' roles in children's services were redefined.)

### **Box 6: Redefinition of social workers' roles - children's services**

Drivers of change:

- shortage of social workers
- efficiency - 'the re-modelling agenda is about aligning resources' (social work, local level policy colleague)
- easing social workers' workloads.

How they changed the skill mix:

- developed the role of a ‘professional assistant’ to use where a qualified social worker is not required, for example as a family point of contact
- used administrative staff more ‘effectively’. Administration work, such as arranging meetings and typing up records of meetings, has been moved away from social workers to administration staff. This frees up social workers.

Source: interview with social work (children’s services) practitioner

From the police pilot, in which support staff have been used to aid the work of the police constables, there have been cost savings. The introduction of civilians to policing as support staff has led to cost savings of a third when compared to the traditional investigation model, which did not use support staff such as investigating officers and team co-ordinators.

Altering the skill mix may decrease costs in the long-term, whilst raising them in the short-term to cover training the support staff in their new tasks. But in assessing costs, account needs to be taken of the cost of inaction. In the social work example, recruitment and training costs may well rise anyway because of labour market pressures. In this context, altering the skill mix of the organisation may be the more cost-effective option.



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# Implementation Issues

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As the preceding sections suggest, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed if workforce redesign is to be effective. Many of these issues concern the process of introduction. They are discussed in the following sub-sections.

## Project and changed management

It seems clear that the change management techniques used to implement workforce redesign projects, at a national and local level, impact on their effectiveness and on staff's perceptions of effectiveness. As other research on people management change suggests, reform is more likely to be primarily positive if:

- there is a well-planned strategy:

*'...ad-hoc solutions don't work. You need something properly organised with proper progression between the two tiers.'* (social work, practitioner)

- there is a proper investment in project management
- the views of all stakeholders are taken into account at inception
- the effects of change are continually reviewed:

*'...it can become clouded where the barriers between what a social worker is needed for and what a professional assistant can do [so] regular supervision and monitoring of who is doing what, so continually reviewing that the roles are defined properly.'* (social work, local level policy practitioner).

The two education policy representatives interviewed argued that the way workforce remodelling was implemented affected how sustainable and effective it was in practice. As part of the workforce remodelling implementation, schools had been encouraged to create 'school change teams' which were made up of representatives from all the staff at the school. However, where schools had experienced problems one policy representative felt it was because 'if there was a school change team it doesn't work anymore or there are issues around how it is being managed' (education, policy colleague).

The quality of management throughout the process of introduction affects how well the changes are implemented at the lowest level. For example, branch managers at Lloyds TSB can have a direct impact on whether or not training is used, which in turn affects customer service and job satisfaction amongst staff. The head teacher can have a similar effect.

## Method of implementation and evaluation

The method of implementation is also likely to have an impact on the ultimate effectiveness of a workforce redesign project. Firstly, the implementation method can affect staff and service users' perceptions of the changes, and secondly, the extent to which success can be measured will influence the end result.

Whether participation in the project is compulsory or voluntary is likely to affect its success and how it is perceived. Participation in the pilot within the police service was voluntary, whereas in the other sectors interviewed participation was largely compulsory. Further, whether the model implemented was chosen or imposed is likely to have an impact on perceptions of the changes. If the model is chosen by the staff and/ or participation is voluntary it seems likely that staff involved will have a positive perception and will strive to ensure it succeeds. Whereas if the opposite is the case staff may be more reluctant to become involved.

Nonetheless whether the model was chosen or imposed, or participation was voluntary or compulsory, good project management and inclusive change management approaches are likely to improve perceptions of the changes. They can also promote the involvement of all stakeholders during the implementation of workforce redesign.

Another key aspect of workforce redesign implementation is the ability to measure its success. In order for the implementation and project itself to be adequately evaluated, front end analysis needs to be conducted. This enables the project to be tailored and evaluated regularly in order to assess its impact. This can have consequences for perceptions. In order to improve perceptions among staff and service users there need to be robust and transparent mechanisms for measuring the outcomes of changing the skill mix of the workforce. Being able to prove that benefits outweigh costs is crucial in securing and sustaining support.

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# Conclusion

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In drawing this short paper to a conclusion we would reiterate only a small number of interviews were conducted in the sectors we looked at. This report is a really scoping exercise to pick out the key themes in skill mix change. Nevertheless, some insights are possible.

The striking impression from the interviews is that many of the answers to questions on the outcome of skill mix initiatives are two sided: on the one hand there is positive news, on the other hand there are concerns or difficulties. Thus changing task allocation seems to some to offer clear role definition whilst to others it produces a blurring of role boundaries. Similarly, customer service might be enhanced by a one-stop-shop delivery model, but might suffer by the use of generalist rather than specialist service staff. This variety in part derives from different perceptions – viewing the world from a number of standpoints. However, it does demonstrate that a great deal of attention needs to be given to the mechanisms of change. At the front end, jobs have to be carefully designed and tasks clearly specified. Pay rates for new and changed jobs need to be carefully considered. Good implementation is vital. Specifically the absence of communication and/or training can cause a good design to fail.

What this brief research does indicate is that done well, skill mix changes can bring about greater organisational efficiency. This can come from:

- employing cheaper staff for some activities;
- reduced overtime by more effective deployment of staff or their increased flexibility
- the need for fewer staff because of the same resource effectiveness.

Better customer service can be achieved through faster response times and simpler process. Staff too may benefit. Their job satisfaction (and pay) can be enhanced if they take on a wider array of duties, increasing their range of skills and this might lead, if not to improved career prospects, then to greater employability. Professional staff may enjoy shorter working hours and less ‘grunge’ if some of their mundane tasks are removed. Turning staff benefits into organisational positives, employers should be better able to attract and retain employees with an enhanced work proposition.

There are, as we have said, risks present with the rewards. Stripping out low-level tasks may well create low-status, low-skill jobs with limited career progression. Of course there may be many in the labour market that would welcome such a post even if it has limited opportunities. If the jobs and people are well matched then this is not a problem. What it can create is unduly stressful ‘professional’ roles. Without the simple tasks, the whole job is taxing. It might be more efficient to increase the contact time of teachers, social workers or medical staff, but it can be draining on employees.

Where multi-skilling is employed, there is a high initial training bill to ensure that all staff are familiar with all roles. There generally has to be a higher management input to ensure the scheme works well. This cost can be paid back if staff are quicker to respond or solve problems, but the training can in retrospect seem expensive if the full range of skills is not regularly utilised, especially if it leads to a requirement for refresher training.

One should not assume that employees, or their representatives, will always see the positive side of these changes. For example, the NUT (National Union of Teachers) refused to sign up to the 2003 National Agreement which set out the key components of workforce remodelling in education. Employees, or their representatives may be concerned with the practicalities; by the introduction of 'cheap' labour; by any implication of work intensification; and so on. The gains may be there for some, but the fear is that it is not for all.

This list of risks reinforces the point that good design and even better implementation can minimise the problems and maximise the benefits. To achieve this nirvana, organisations should address a recurring theme in this report: marrying up the policy intention with practice on the ground. Too rigid or dogmatic a design coming from the policy 'centre' can be difficult to implement on the ground. Purely bottom up models suffer from inconsistency and perpetual reinvention. The happy medium is for sites to be able to tailor the policy framework to fit their particular circumstances.

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