

CAREERS & RECRUITMENT

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How to proceed after redundancy

To avoid a negative impact on productivity after making people redundant, it is important to communicate with those who are staying and who are leaving, writes Gareth Naughton

For those who lose their jobs, redundancy can be difficult to deal with. What fewer realise is that redundancy can be equally unsettling for their colleagues who remain in their jobs with more tasks, fewer resources and a dwindling sense of workplace camaraderie.

Employers who fail to address the impact of redundancy on this group face risks such as distrust, resentment and fear. If this is handled badly, productivity can suffer, affecting sales and profits.

Since 2009 – when the recession really began to bite – more than 166,000 people in Ireland have been made redundant.

The trend shows no sign of stopping, with just under 30,000 people reportedly losing their jobs in the first half of the year. The majority of workplaces around the country, large and small, have been touched in some way by this trend.

Grieving process

While it is a difficult experience for those who are let go, redundancy can also present challenges for the members of staff that escape the chop.

One recent survey found that 67 per cent of redundancy survivors reported lower morale, and 53 per cent said the experience had left them demotivated.

The employers questioned in the survey by IRS Employment Review in Britain reported higher rates of absenteeism through illness – 65 per cent said stress levels among staff had increased, and 17 per cent said they had trouble retaining employees.

Jackie Prendergast, management consultant with Consulting Excellence, likened the experiences of survivors of redundancy to grieving, particularly in cases where longstanding colleagues lost their jobs.

"There is a whole lot of guilt going on. They still have a job and their friend doesn't and they are seeing them struggle," said Prendergast.

"On top of that they are worrying: 'Is this business going down the tubes? Am I going to have a job in another two months?' Then they are stressed about the workload. They already have a very busy job and now they are expected to do more, probably for less money or, at best, for the same



Adrienne O'Hare, managing director of To Be Training and Development

money. How are they going to manage all of that? Nobody thinks about any of that.

"Primarily, the thinking is about restructuring jobs and giving people more to do, which is not necessarily addressing how that – and everything else happening – is going to impact on those people," she said.

Right approach

Redundancies will always have a knock-on effect on those staff who remain with a firm, but the manner in which employers approach the process can make a big difference.

"When employees see their colleagues turfed out of their jobs with excessive force, it fosters distrust and reinforces the idea that the company does not care about its staff," said Sharon Vize, senior consultant, Career Consultants.

"Sometimes, the way redundancies are handled can be a little bit insensitive and you can only imagine what is happening to the people left behind," said Vize.

"Some organisations would be as blunt as having security arrive at your desk and remove you from the premises – and the individual has done nothing wrong. For an employee staying behind, to see that kind of behaviour is quite damaging."

The manner in which redundancies are delivered differs from company to company, but the experts advise upfront communication with staff. Let them know there will be cuts and where the cuts will be. It is also important to talk to the people that will be affected.

"For a true redundancy to exist, it is the job that no longer exists – so it is key that you treat people losing their jobs

with dignity and respect. Of course, the decision has to be made to remove them from the building, but it is also about the support that you give those individuals," said Vize.

"That can be seen as very good by those who are left behind – although redundancies are not a nice thing to do, the company is looking after people and giving them support and encouragement to get back into the market as quickly as possible."

Clear communication

It is important that employers give consideration to the impact job cuts will have on the remaining workforce throughout the redundancy process.

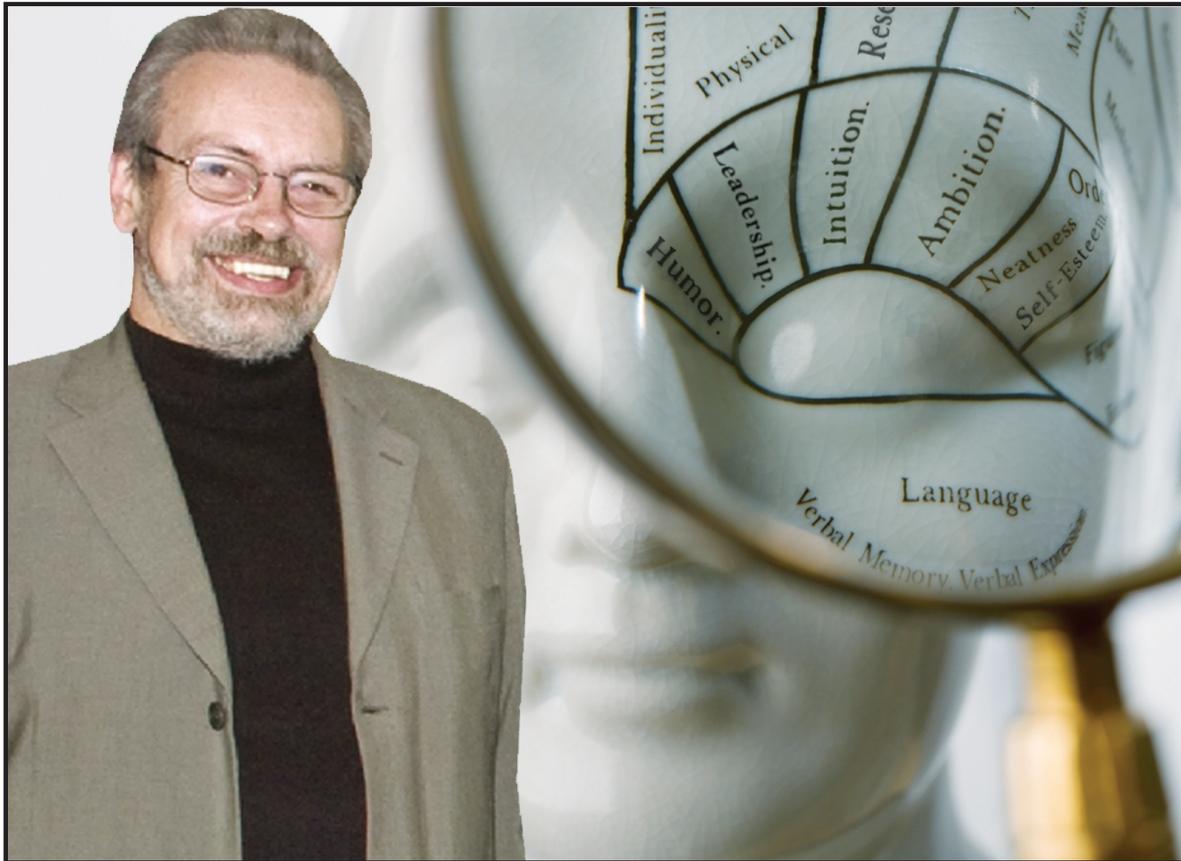
There can be little gained from closing the door once the horse has bolted. Survivors should be offered the same level of support as those whose jobs are cut, according to Adrienne O'Hare, managing director of To Be Training and Development.

"Don't wait until the redundancies have happened and the individuals have exited and then turn around and think, 'Oh my goodness, what are we going to do about everybody else?'" said O'Hare.

"Morale has been impacted. Think about that right at the beginning and ensure that communication is open and continues throughout the whole process. People will know if it is an afterthought."

It is no use taking the attitude that employees should be grateful for their jobs and get on with things – this will breed resentment and prompt them to start looking for employment elsewhere.

Communication is key. The



Occupational psychologist Dr Damian Davy: 'These days, offering employment itself is seen as a reward'

rumour mill can be hugely damaging, so openness and transparency about what you are doing – and the rationale behind it – is vital.

If employees feel you are making an effort to address their concerns, even if there is little you can do to alleviate the extra pressure that restructuring brings, they will respond in kind.

"You need to work with them on their career path. Help support them in feeling more empowered around taking responsibility and managing their own careers rather than feeling that they are at the mercy of the winds of change," said O'Hare.

"When the psychological contract with employees is damaged, so is trust. It affects employee engagement, which can affect productivity, and the high-performing individuals – the ones that you want to retain in the organisation – may start to look elsewhere."

Wellbeing and resilience

With restructuring comes extra pressure on the remaining employees, who are expected to do more for less. To avoid burn-out, it is crucial that employers pay due attention to

their well-being.

It is important that companies continue to look after the well-being of those employees, if they are to avoid burning them out and losing them to physical or emotional illness.

"The traditional thing when a company cuts back is that they tend to cut the softer skill

areas – what they might see as training and development. We would think that the development area actually encourages employees," said Dublin-based occupational psychologist Dr Damian Davy.

"These days, offering employment itself is seen as a reward. Trying to create a more

cohesive, cooperative and respectful environment for people to work in is a better way of doing it when you cannot offer them promotions or extra money."

The focus should not be solely on stress management, but also on building resilience among staff – giving them the

tools to achieve a decent work-life balance and cope with the extra pressure.

"It is about that which is within us which allows us to bounce back from situations – how resilient we are. People have a lot to face in managing the new kind of pressurised workplace," said Davy.

How to prepare for redundancies

A round of redundancies will fundamentally change how your organisation works. However, failure to manage this transformation properly can be disastrous, according to Jackie Prendergast, management consultant with Consulting Excellence.

"Any employer about to institute redundancies should consider the people who are left behind and how they are going to retain, motivate and engage them and make sure that they are buying into the future of the organisation," said Prendergast.

Here are Prendergast's top ten tips for boosting morale and restoring trust in the workforce following job cuts.

■ **Communication:** be honest about what is happening and do not make promises about the future that you may not be able to keep. Treat your managers and staff as responsible

adults. Do not try to hide bad news from them – this will only undermine your credibility.

■ **Be visible and accessible:** now is not the time for extended business trips or working from home. You and your managers need to be on site, working alongside your staff, willing and able to answer questions.

■ **Put yourself in their shoes:** consider how they are feeling, and their needs. Show empathy and understanding, listening openly to their fears and concerns.

■ **Lead:** give clear direction, reinforcing the sense that you are all working together towards a shared goal. Clarify any new roles and responsibilities while being positive in your language and outlook.



Jackie Prendergast

■ **Lay your cards on the table and ask for their help:** Engage with staff in developing an action plan for their future. They need to feel that their opinions are valued.

■ **Be transparent:** explain the reasoning behind your actions and make it clear that you are set on addressing future challenges.

■ **Keep managers informed:** this will allow them to talk to their teams. Train and support them so

that they are able to deal with traumatic change and make sure they are equipped with the necessary people management skills.

■ **Rebuild your team:** the team dynamics have changed and new teams will need to work together. Reward and recognition are now more vital than ever. Celebrate your success and encourage social interaction and team-building activities.

■ **Manage workloads and performance:** look carefully at the process and find opportunities for streamlining. There is a danger of overloading your remaining staff and managers.

■ **Support your employees:** provide training for new tasks and responsibilities and time management; consider stress management courses and employee assistance programmes.

working WEEK

Ronan Maher is a director and senior Tomatis sound therapy consultant with Cluas. Established in Dublin in 2003, Cluas opened a second facility in Cork last March. Cluas employs ten people at the two locations to assist young people with developmental difficulties.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

My first responsibility involves advising parents about how Cluas and other organisations can help their child achieve their potential. Along with the other clinical director, I devise individual programmes for every child or student who comes to Cluas. I bring together my training in music, psychology and speech and language processing – with my interests in music technology and neuro-

science – to develop the best individual approach for every child we see.

What are your professional motivators?

I want our services to reach the widest group of young children and older students in Ireland as possible, while maintaining the necessary standard of care and expertise.

How would you describe your work style?

Relaxed, but hard working. I am a little disorganised, but that is why we have a team. Between us all we try to do everything well.

What rates as your best business decision?

Opening Cluas Cork in 2011, to bring our services to Munster, where there is a population of about a million. Prior to this, families there had to travel to Dublin, which was just too much for many. Despite the difficult economy, we all have to find the strength to try to even add one job for one person, so we



Ronan Maher

can begin to meet the social challenges we face.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned?

To be flexible and make good use of all you have available. Two years ago, we realised we needed to work smarter. With the support of our team, we changed our working week, so that we would be available to families from 8am to 7pm. Just by having flexible working hours – from 8am to 4:30pm on some weeks and from 10:30am to 7pm on others – everyone benefited.

Who do you most admire in

Irish business and why?

My parents Liz Franklin and Pascal Maher, founders of Cluas. My father is clinical director, while my mother has since handed over her responsibilities to me. They had the courage and interest in children and students to start Cluas in 2003, without any government or other supports.

What are your expectations for Irish business in the months ahead?

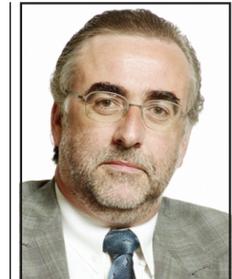
I think we all know it will be tough, but there is a population of well-educated and willing young people in Ireland who want to work. We have to make sure that the services we provide are as cost-effective as possible and try to find new ways to develop useful technology.

What is your ultimate professional goal?

To continue to help families with young people with special needs, by hopefully strengthening and even growing Cluas a little in the next three years.



■ **Luc Gijssens** is the new chairman of KBC Bank Ireland. Gijssens has been a member of the KBC Group Executive Committee since being appointed chief executive of Merchant Banking Business Unit last May. Before that, he was a member of



Luc Gijssens

KBC's Merchant Management Committee for five years and senior general manager of KBC Bank's Corporate Services for two years.

■ **Marketing English in Ireland (MEI)** has appointed **Oliver**



Oliver Lyons

Lyons as its new chairman. Lyons is director of Dublin's Swan Training Institute, a company he co-founded in 1988. He was previously chairman of MEI's Visa Committee for two years until 2011 and treasurer of the association from 2008 to 2009.



Donald Williamson

■ **Donald Williamson** is the new sales director of McLoughlins, a home and garden-ware importer. Williamson joins from Britvic Ireland, where he was commercial director for 11 years. He was Coca-Cola Ireland's head of sales for four years previously.