

H4 Consulting Brief

In the Loop

People in publicly funded organisations work hard to contribute information that informs important decisions being made by others. When this work is not fit for purpose, it will often be redone from scratch by time-poor, frustrated executives. When staff are not involved in decision forums, and therefore do not understand the context around decisions, it is easy for their work to be poorly targeted, or even irrelevant, because they are out of the loop.

Many smart and highly motivated people at all levels in publicly funded organisations work hard to produce quality work. Too often, however, senior staff find themselves redoing a lot of that work. In the past, a piece of work could be reviewed and revised several times, partly because technology slowed down the editing process. As technology has changed, the pace and volume of work is too great for those old ways of working. Increasingly, executives feel like they cannot get in front of the work, and do not have time to invest in helping staff to produce better drafts.

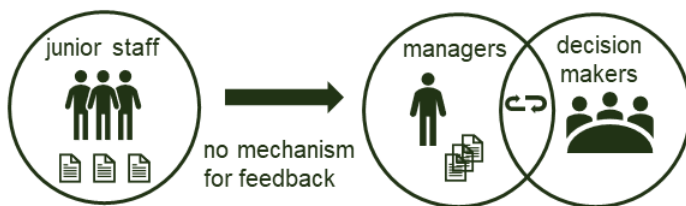
Junior staff may be doing their best, but without the necessary context and advice from senior staff, it can be difficult even to understand what is expected, and even more difficult to produce it.

Senior staff who are swamped with redoing the work of others seldom have time to explain the context for decisions. This means that junior staff may never learn to produce work that is fit for purpose.

Expectations that senior staff will be the primary creators of content, rather than facilitating the work of teams, can become normalised, and productivity is capped at the capacity of the manager, rather than the team as a whole.

If junior staff stop feeling ownership over their work, they are less inclined to make their best efforts. This diffusion of accountability pushes even more work up the line, while junior staff who never have the opportunity to be truly accountable for their work may still feel blamed for its inadequacies.

work being redone by senior staff



staff doing the work with the right information



Ensuring that mechanisms are in place for feedback allows two-way communication between the people doing the work and those signing off on it. By defining and clearly communicating the context, purpose, and expectations of the work right from the start, executives and managers can set their staff up to produce higher quality work in the first instance.

Even improving insight into decision making processes can help staff to produce better information. Routine mechanisms to debrief staff after major decision forums, like budget decisions or new policy directions, give staff access to contextual information that can apply to a lot of their work. Open debriefs also help staff to see the outcomes of their work and how it relates to important decisions, increasing both their motivation and their ownership of the work.

Staff at the top levels of organisations know that they need to invest in orchestrating resources rather than trying to do, or redo, all the work themselves. Creating routine mechanisms to give staff feedback helps to break the endless loop of inadequate work needing to be redone urgently and leaving no time for feedback. Armed with context, clarity about what is expected of them, and understanding the importance of their work, staff will be both more motivated and capable.

When junior staff get more work right, senior staff need only add the finishing touches. Breaking the endless loop of work and rework dramatically increases total productivity over time. Senior staff have even more time to facilitate even better work by investing more of their time in closing the loop between the work of the team and how that work is ultimately used to create public value.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: info@h4consulting.com.au
Find additional resources at www.h4consulting.com.au/resources