



# Reciprocal Loyalty

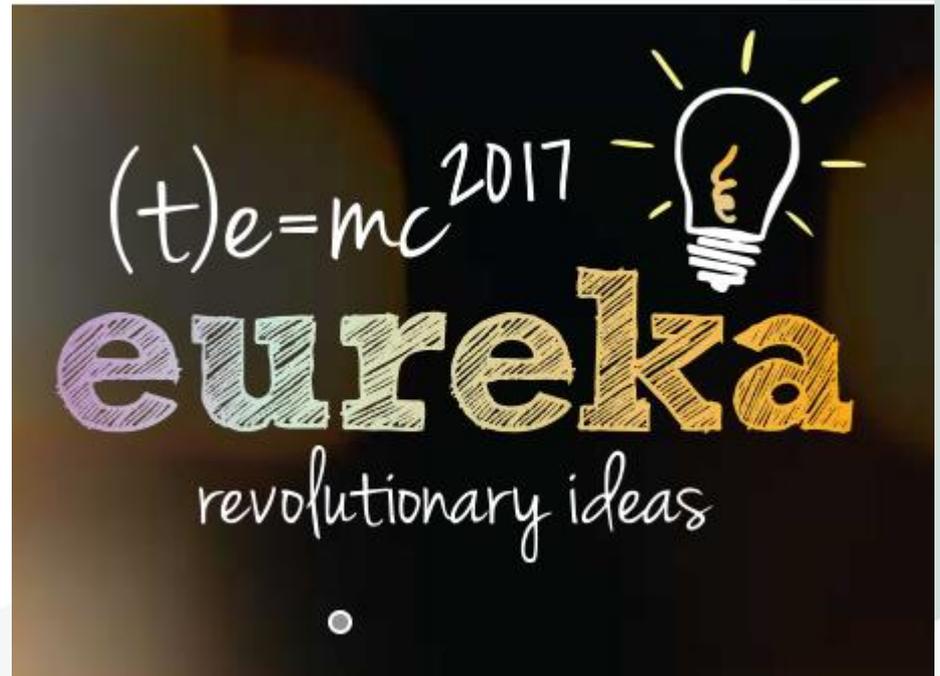
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**Matthew Hisbent. FAUA**

**Head of Operations, Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford**

**Emma Coles**

**Major Projects Manager, Oxford Brookes Business School**



The 'Eureka' theme of the 2017 Conference suggests that *'all ideas start somewhere...a scribble on paper, a light-bulb moment in the bath, a spark from a conversation.'*

Our light bulb moment was in realising (again) that people mattered more to us than logistics.

Our experienced community of professional services teams would be the key to managing a smooth Relocation and ensuring the highest staff and student experience throughout.

We made a promise – ***“we hope and expect that you are all coming to Headington with us...”***



# Who am I?

**Matthew Hisbent**  
**Head of Operations**  
**Oxford Brookes Business School**



**Approx 70 fte mix of part time, full time, permanent and fixed term contract**

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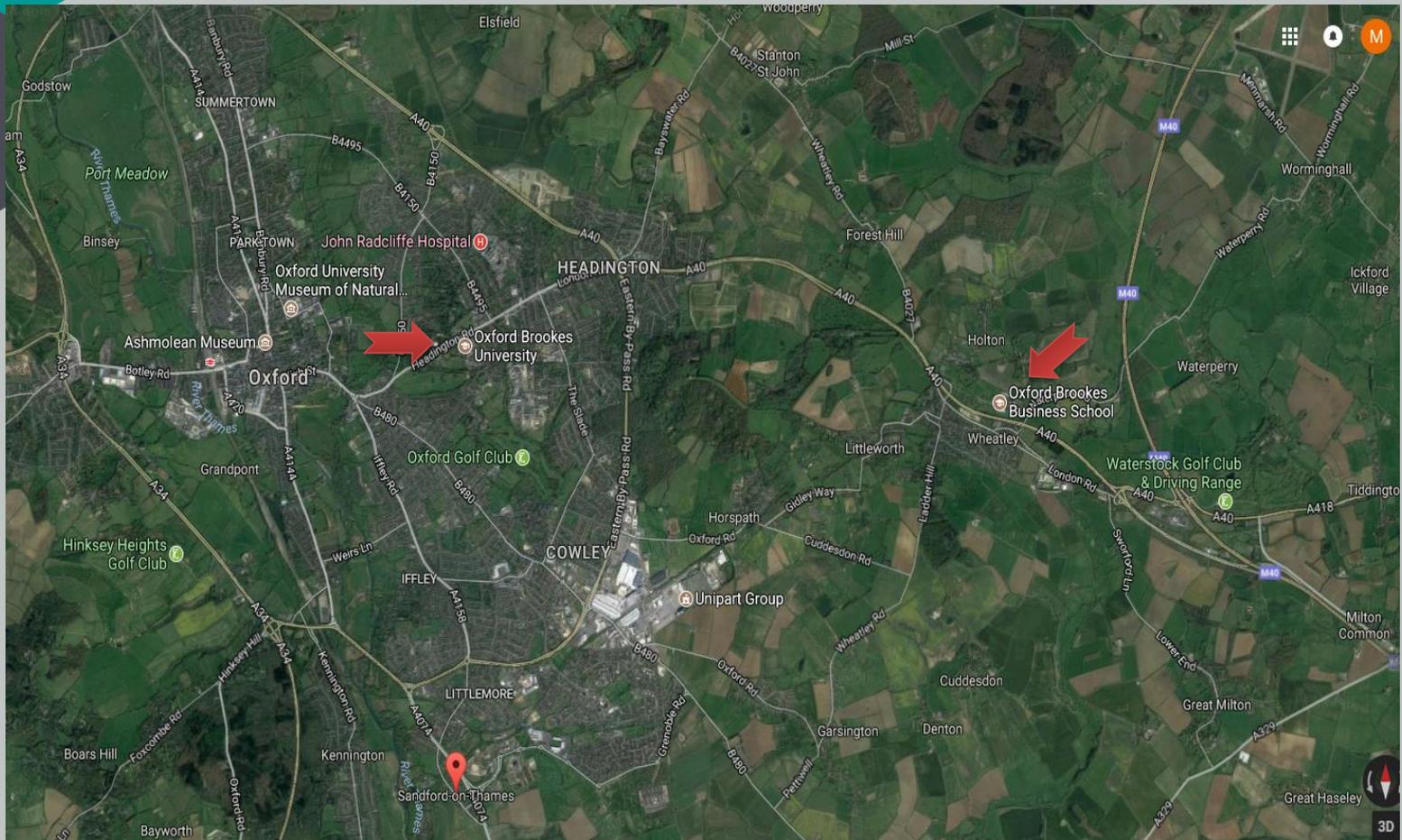
**Training restaurant with 10 -15 fte allied to Hospitality programmes of study (and commercial)**

Connecting  
and developing  
HE professionals

Located 7 miles East of the City of Oxford, UK

AUA

Est 1961



# What were we trying to do?

**At its most simple, we were trying to step away for a moment from bedknobs and broomsticks, carpets and crates, remake, remodel, recycle, laptops and loo brushes, WEEE and Whexit and discuss the implications of the move in the context of some important research into ‘keeping your best staff’. We wanted to ground the logistical exercise of relocation in the available theoretical concepts which since 2001 have mushroomed. Whilst the focus of this study were our staff colleagues throughout the project we did not lose sight of the student experience, especially for continuing students who had started their course on one campus and were finishing it on another (albeit a more modern campus.)**



# WHAT DID WE ALIGHT UPON

- ❖ We had the inkling – Reciprocal Loyalty allied to existing ideas about staff development – what were we prepared to invest to reap the reward of our best people staying with us despite the trauma of change?
- ❖ We found ‘job embeddedness’ which is reflected in the growing literature since 2001 and the publication of a paper by **Mitchell et al.** in which they introduced and gave a lasting name to the phenomenon of Job Embeddedness. They investigated and connected the key concepts of **links, community and sacrifice**, super-ceding more established concepts of organisational commitment, job alternatives and job search in a way which had not previously been done.





**With support from the Leadership Foundation in the UK we embarked upon a project called "Reciprocal loyalty: Using the experience of transitioning to a new Business school to evaluate and develop a community of practice in professional services teams."**

**We wanted to consider the experience of transitioning to a new Business school through the lens of theoretical models of job embeddedness and to consider the impact on the staff experience of an established multi-team 'community of practice' in professional services.**

**Along the way we would come to challenge the notion of a community of practice and how that can be developed and maintained.**

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# AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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To analyse the impact of a defined instance of major change and chart this through surveys, workshops and conversations to a census date after the physical relocation was complete.

To synthesise the various strands of activity and the documents produced to reflect the full picture of the change as it unfolded over a year of activity.

To provide insight into the operation of the theoretical model of job embeddedness in a real life situation where trust, faith and loyalty are strained beyond normal parameters whilst maintaining the expected high level of service offered to students and other key OBBS stakeholders.

To raise the profile of professional services in OBBS beyond service delivery into a sector wide contribution into the discussion on staff development and retention of staff.



2

# WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

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My old man said *'follow the van'*.....





3 Key  
concepts  
and  
theories

The work of **Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015)**

conceptualised communities of practice:

*“Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”*

That to us encapsulates the drive behind this project and behind all of our work in the various different work strands. Oxford Brookes Business School comprises a large group of people with a new and shared ‘Mission and Vision’ who are engaged in a process of collective learning in a shared domain. One of the key words which **Wenger-Trayner** uses is ‘identity’ and from the start of the project and subsequently the case study one of the major drivers for OBBS has been the need and desire to forge a new identity for the School within a new space on an already mature and very busy modern campus.

**Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner** go on to say

*“Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems - in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.”*

This is particularly apt given that one of the Business School’s aims is to extend that sustained interaction beyond the borders of the School more deeply into the University and beyond.

One of the most important and interesting ways in which the community came together to discuss the ‘community of practice’ was the series of ‘Change Workshops’. Eight change workshops were conducted in total, facilitated by an experienced change management facilitator, Ian Whiting, from the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development supported by Emma Coles (Professional services major projects manager) , Steve Brown (Professional services Facilities manager) and Paul Jackson (Academic) for OBBS.

Welcome to your Whexit newsletter... Keeping you updated with developments from project streams and the School Relocation team

### Dates for your diary

**10 July** – Packing crates for *academic staff* will be delivered and distributed to individual offices.

**7 August** – Packing crates for *professional services staff* will be delivered and distributed to individual offices.

**Please remember:** your office will need to **completely empty** by the end of August (date to be confirmed)... The only items remaining will be furniture, filing cabinet(s) and phones. Further details will be emailed by the Facilities Team as to the process of handing back your keys

### E212

We have commandeered E212 for disposal of heaters, fans, kettles, printers, etc. Any electrical items will need to be stored here until they are disposed of. Please carry any items you can to E212. If you have larger electrical items that you cannot manage, just email the Facilities Team ([business-facilitiesandserviceteam@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:business-facilitiesandserviceteam@brookes.ac.uk)) who will arrange disposal for you. And yes, heaters and fans will be available in Headington.



### E Block loft

On Monday 17 July, an intrepid team of our brave staff will be undertaking an expedition to the loft in E block.

The aim is to completely empty this area (into a nearby skip!); a feat that has never been attempted before. So, if you have ever stored anything up there, please make alternative storage arrangements before this date. They key can be obtained from the Facilities Team.



### Really? Quashing rumours and dispelling myths...

**Anything I leave in my office will be magically transported to Headington**

**Fiction!** See the cautionary tale of the contents of E block loft above.

### **Involvement of the School Executive.**

Whilst the School Executive was keen for as much consultation as possible to happen, colleagues were also articulating a need for clear and unambiguous leadership from senior management. These ranged from guidance on the overall build project (from the Clerici project Board on which the PVC/Dean; the ADSD and the Head of Operations sit) to a range of much more detailed issues including occupation of new spaces and student access to staff.



### **The Habanero issues 1 – Trust and support**

Clarity on the parking policy,  
Additional transitional measures  
Student parking for continuing students (important because colleagues were not thinking only of self or 'staff' but very much about their students.  
Parking for events and visitors



**The Habanero issues 2 - Travel to work**

**Storti (2011)** identifies a similar need in the experience of individuals changing cultures as part of work mobility.

*...there will also be numerous procedures, regulations and office protocols to learn and many of your work routines will have to be painstakingly re-established... the challenge here is emotional and psychological ... and practical. One of the first things you have to learn about the community is how to find your way around – how it is laid out and where things are in relation to other things...*



**The Habanero issues 3 – A new culture of working**

### **Flexible working policy**

This rapidly became one of the cornerstones not only of business as usual but of the incentivisation debate. The Business School already has a legacy of utilising different forms of structured flexibility in conjunction with assessments of the business needs.

What was new here was that :-

We could expect more colleagues than usual to ask for some kind of flexible working as it appeared to address many of the practical issues around transport that have so pre-occupied their thoughts.

We forecast a need for managers (especially within Professional services) to receive more training in how to respond to multiple simultaneous requests such that it didn't just become 'first come first served' and 'too late'. Transition takes time and patience.



## **The Habanero issues 3 – Flexible working Policies**

### **The ticking time bomb**

This perhaps speaks most directly to the central theme of the study – job embeddedness. From the start the School Executive considered the implications and business impact of a major exodus of colleagues in the months leading up to the relocation.

The closer we got to the move deadline, the more severe the impact of a large number of staff leaving OBBS could be. Several scenarios were suggested:

Staff could leave between May 2017 and August 2017 thus leaving us too short of staff to deliver and support our activities in semester one.

Staff would make the move with us and would stay long enough to ‘test out’ the new facility, working patterns and travel to work and then leave after say 6 months.

Staff would make the move with us and through some aspect of job embeddedness (personal or professional or simply a lack of a suitable alternative to go to) would stay with us for the long haul.

We could lose key, experienced and qualified academic staff which would directly impact on our ability to negotiate AACSB criteria on staff qualifications and profiles.



### **The Habanero issue 4 – will you go or will you stay?**



## Staff development

Looking at a range of staff development strategies you can see a range of similar ideas in support of a sustainability agenda:

- **Developing leadership, innovation and providing excellent service.**
- **Aligning your investment in staff development with strategic aims and objectives (and mission).**
- **Attracting, developing and ultimately retaining the best staff**
- **Supporting structured programmes of professional growth**
- **sustaining development in support of careers**
- **Enhancing performance**
- **Valuing diversity**



We successfully moved between 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September

Report to Leadership Foundation July 7th

Presentation to Vice Chancellor's Senior Staff meeting in July

Presentation at 2 conferences

2017 CABS conference at University of Liverpool 11-12 December 2017.

2 facilitated focus group lunchtime sessions post-move

Proposal submitted to AUA Conference 26-27 March 2018.

One of the more interesting studies in this area came out of a South African HE institution and depending on the reaction of LF to this study we would like to explore the possibility of a new study with a UK- international flavour. One of the co-authors is putting together a plan for a trip to Cape Town in January 2018 to complete research on a book and it may be possible with external support to extend that to include visits to colleagues in 2 South African HE Institutions to further discussions on a joint SA-UK project.

