



When The Structures Change, Who Do We Become?

Part Two: Reorganising the Organisation, Disrupting the Self

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You can redraw an organisation chart overnight.

You cannot redraw a person's sense of who they are in the same timeframe.

Local Government Reorganisation tends to be planned in spreadsheets and governance papers. Timelines, TUPE arrangements, service mapping, financial modelling. All of it necessary. None of it sufficient.

Because running alongside every merger, every new authority, every structural transition — there is something that doesn't appear in any of the project plans. The quiet, disorienting experience of people whose professional world is changing in ways they did not choose and cannot fully control.

This piece is about them. The workforce and the leaders navigating LGR together, often carrying more than anyone has acknowledged.

What work means to people

For many people working in local government, this is not just a job. It is a vocation. A choice to work in public service, often at salaries that could be higher elsewhere, because the work feels meaningful. Because it connects them to a place and to the people who live there.

That connection matters. It shapes how people turn up, how they go the extra mile, how they build relationships with the communities they serve over years and sometimes decades.

Professional identity — the sense of *I am someone who does this, in this place, for these people* — is not a soft concept. It is part of how human beings make sense of themselves. When it is disrupted, the impact is real, even when it is invisible on the restructure timeline.

People in local government facing reorganisation are often asked to keep delivering at full capacity while simultaneously not knowing what their role will look like in six months, whether their team will stay together, or whether the culture they have built will survive the transition. That is an enormous amount to hold.

And it deserves to be named.



The loyalty that doesn't show up on the organisation chart

Spend any time with people who have worked in local government for a long time and you will notice something. They don't just talk about their job. They talk about their council. Their authority. Their team. There is a tribal belonging that develops over years of working within a particular organisation, serving a particular place.

That loyalty is an asset. It drives discretionary effort, local knowledge, and the kind of relational commitment that no job description can mandate. It is the reason a housing officer goes the extra mile for a family in crisis, or a community development worker turns up to something on a Saturday because they genuinely care.

But in a reorganisation, that same loyalty can become a source of real pain. When the organisation you gave yourself to is absorbed, restructured, or simply ceases to exist, the loss is personal even if nobody officially marks it as such.

There is also something harder to talk about: the tension between old loyalties and new ones. Staff from different authorities brought together into a single organisation do not automatically become one team. They bring their habits, their cultures, their ways of doing things, their quiet assumptions about whose approach is *really* the right one. Managing that — honestly, carefully, and without pretending it isn't happening — is one of the most human challenges of any merger.

What leaders are carrying

I want to say something directly about the leaders and managers in the middle of all of this, because they are often the most overlooked people in the conversation.

They are expected to hold their teams together. To communicate with clarity when clarity is not yet available. To model stability when they feel anything but stable. To answer questions they do not yet have the answers to, and to do all of this while managing their own uncertainty about what their role will look like on the other side.

That is genuinely hard. And the expectation that leaders should simply absorb that difficulty — should present as confident and decisive while privately navigating the same disorientation as everyone else — is one of the things that makes reorganisations harder than they need to be.

The most effective leaders I have seen in periods of significant change are not the ones who pretend to have all the answers. They are the ones who are honest about what they know and what they don't. Who create enough psychological safety that their teams can say what they are actually feeling. Who understand that holding the uncertainty together, openly, is itself a form of leadership.

That takes courage. And it takes organisations — at the most senior levels — to give leaders permission to lead that way, rather than expecting performance of confidence that nobody genuinely feels.

The people who hold things together

In my doctoral research, one of the things that struck me most was this: the best community engagement I found was not being driven by systems or strategies. It was being driven by individuals — people who had made a personal commitment to reaching those who were hardest to reach, and who did so often despite organisational structures rather than because of them.

Those people exist in every local authority. The ones who carry the relationships. Who are known and trusted in communities that have every reason not to trust. Who have built something, quietly and consistently, over years.

Reorganisation puts those people at risk. Not because anyone intends to lose them, but because when people are managing their own uncertainty, they contract inward. The discretionary, relational, often invisible work that holds communities together is precisely what becomes hardest to sustain when the ground is shifting.

Any new authority that does not actively identify, protect, and value those people will lose something it may not even notice is gone until the damage is done.

What compassionate change leadership looks like

None of this is insurmountable. But it requires leaders and organisations to take the human dimension of reorganisation as seriously as the structural one.

That means being honest early, even when the full picture isn't clear. Silence does not protect people — it leaves them to fill the gaps with anxiety.

It means creating genuine space for people to grieve what is being lost, not just celebrate what is being built. Both things can be true at once. A new authority can be a genuine opportunity and a real loss simultaneously. Acknowledging that is not weakness — it is honesty.

It means paying attention to culture from day one. Not assuming that a new structure will generate a new culture automatically. Culture is made by people, in the way they treat each other, in what they choose to talk about and what they leave unsaid. It has to be intentionally shaped.

And it means remembering, always, that the people going through this are not *resources* to be reorganised. They are human beings doing meaningful work in communities that need them. The more that is honoured in the process, the better the outcomes will be — for the organisation, and for the people it exists to serve.

A final thought

Reorganisation will happen. In many places it is already happening. The question is not whether change is coming but whether the people leading it are paying attention to the full cost — and the full opportunity — of what they are asking people to go through.

The people who hold local government together — who carry the relationships, the local knowledge, the quiet commitment to communities — are worth protecting. Not just because it makes organisational sense. But because it is the right thing to do.