

Critical Evaluation of the Kingston University 'Introduction Days'

Gabrielle Ferguson and Lilith Arevshatian

Abstract

This mixed-method case study is an evaluation of Kingston University's (KU) 'Introduction Days'. Data consisted of new starter feedback, comments from the Staff Survey, and insights from focus groups. Thematic analysis identified four themes that negatively impacted on the induction process; and in particular, on orientation events. Data show that new starters were unaware of KU's organisational strategy. Many found the organisational structure confusing in relation to their role and reported difficulties in getting to know colleagues. Finally participants expressed that the new starter webpage was insufficient. Recommendations for practice are proposed.

Introduction

Research Aim

- To evaluate new starter perceptions of KU Introduction Days

Background

Induction is the process whereby employees adjust or acclimatise to their jobs and working environment (CIPD, 2013). A successful induction is important as it improves retention, increases morale, and enables employees to reach their peak productivity quicker (Moscato, 2005). However, orientation is defined as specific training programmes that introduce new starters to the larger organisation (Klein and Weaver, 2010) and should highlight the congruence between an employees' values and those of the organisation (Cable and Parsons, 2001). These events should focus on the strategy, history and values of the organisation.

Methodology

Case Study Context:

Kingston University (KU) is an employer of over 2000 staff, based across 4 campuses. There is no standardised corporate induction process for staff, but the Human Resources (HR) department runs KU 'Introduction Days' bi-annually.

Data

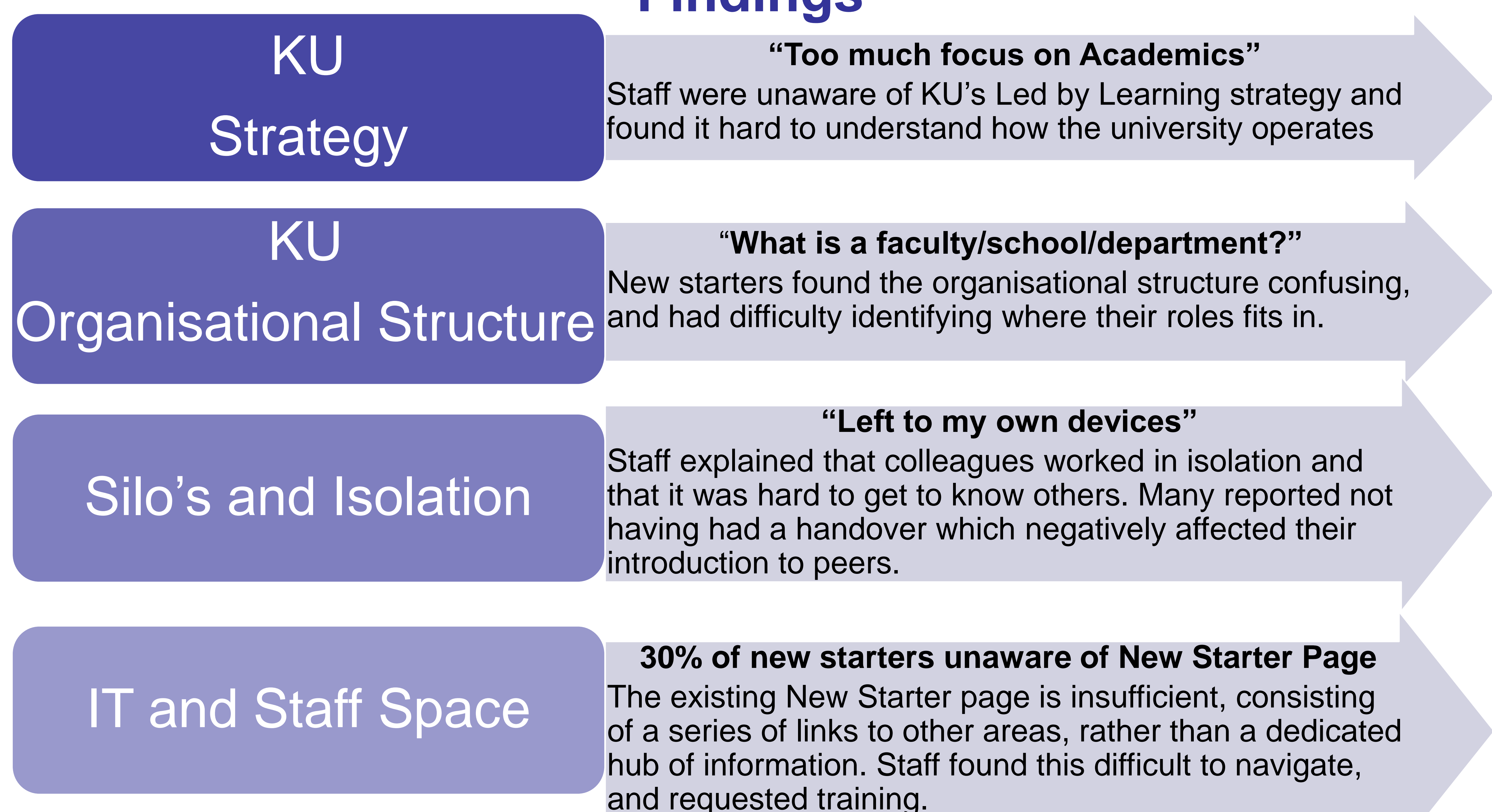
- KU Introduction Day evaluations
- Staff Survey comments
- Induction focus groups

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.



Findings



Discussion

The KU Introduction Days do not fulfil the objectives of orientation events, and therefore leave large learning gaps for new staff. They do not sufficiently introduce the organisational structure, as suggested by Klein and Weaver, leaving participants unsure of where their role fits it. The events do not sufficiently explain the Led by Learning strategy to new starters, and therefore cannot effectively increase their commitment to the organisation. Staff are left lonely or bored during their introductory period, undermining the socializing effect of peer support (Antonacopoulou and Güttel, 2010)

Recommendations

Key recommendations based on data analysis:

- Specific session on the Kingston Led by Learning strategy which feeds into the "Student Experience" session, to unite academic and professional services staff.
- A more in-depth session on the KU structure with explanations of the governance processes and hierarchy. This should include examples of the cross-departmental issues that Kingston faces.
- Action Learning Set session to utilise new starters' "fresh perspective" to solve current KU issues, introducing them to the context of higher education