

Are reshuffles a good idea?

Good management in companies works hard on succession planning, mentoring, supporting people in jobs, offering training, and talking to employees about their career development. There are regular appraisals which provide a chance for senior managers to explain again what they are looking for and for employees to comment on the workplace, support and direction. If an employee does need removing from post it should not come as a surprise, as it will follow a process of warnings, reviews and attempts to sort out the issues that worry the management.

Governments of all persuasions have handled Ministerial jobs rather differently. Ministers may not have not been told whether they are doing well or badly. They have often not been offered support, training, guidance or mentoring on how to carry out difficult and complex roles. When it comes to reshuffle time quite a lot of Ministers stay near a phone with no idea of whether they are likely to be left where they are, promoted, moved sideways or fired.

There is plenty of talent in the Commons, and plenty of get up and go by individual MPs who want to make a contribution or take a special interest in a cause, department or area of work. Somehow governments need to find a better system of mapping the talent, understanding the knowledge and enthusiasms of those who are elected, and deploying it in the right places within government and the wider public space. Of course the high degree of accountability and public engagement required of a Minister makes it a bit different from senior management positions in many businesses, but there are still things to learn from the higher professional standards now being expected of those in the better companies. Meanwhile the private sector can learn from the public sector more about the need to listen carefully and respond well to the public who are the ultimate paymasters and judges of both sectors.