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Innovating to achieve sustainable wellbeing inside the built environment
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Vin: [There is] very detailed planning because we had to continue with the service… People were putting in extra hours to kit it out.

Janet: People [were] getting used to the change before they went the whole hog.

James: We didn't have the standard work set-up before the [workstation] was put in place. You could only get a feel for how it was going to work once it was in place.

From these three brief fragments that highlight the nature of communication, transparency and paradox, it strikes me how different this is from other more general discussions about Lean. Here I have often heard Lean reified and described as if it were some form of fixed object to be picked up and applied irrespective of the fluid social context; akin to a bandage being applied to a wound. A recent example of this stated: 'Use Lean methodology to optimize all pre and post … activities with the aim of eliminating unnecessary … waste and inefficiency.' Such definitive and assured language gives little indication as to the nature of the work involved to reap long-term benefits from a cohort of staff who have been developed to continually seek new and better ways of working.

Perhaps this is understandable; indeed as Lackoff and Johnson[4] argue in their book on metaphor, this is the means by which we engage in and describe our experience of the world:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substance of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities and substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them and quantify them – and, by this means, reason with them. (p.25)

However, although understandable, it has the effect of diverting attention away from a contingent ongoing social process where people are working through a paradox of the known/unknown, identifying how they are to work together with increasing benefit to the customer and the organization.

With these issues in mind, what were the key features that came out of the conversation? Probably the most significant was a sense of legitimizing an ongoing conversation between all people in the different hierarchies. As part of this there was an overt recognition of people's differing knowledge and expertise, which led to 'authorizing environments' being created between managers, supervisors, staff and others as they worked their way through the processes. These authorizing environments gave people the responsibility to develop new ways of working within agreed constraints that played to their skills and knowledge. This was facilitated by the various physical activities that were done or features that were present, for example, value stream analysis workshops, rapid improvement events, visual management boards, process flow layouts and so on. In other words, what was important were not these events and things per se, but the conversation they 'gave permission to' between different people who perhaps would not normally speak with each other over an extended period of time focusing on benefits to the customer and organization.

It is clear that Lean will have an increasingly important part to play in all aspects of health. My purpose in this short opinion piece is to give voice to the vital social nature of such endeavours, particularly if we are to avoid the pressures and pitfalls of shifting processes from one group of people to another in the expectation that results follow as if we are all machines. For those who are still tempted along such a path, one only has to watch the first 10 minutes of Charlie Chaplin's movie classic *Modern Times* to see what fate would await us.

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Innovating to achieve sustainable wellbeing inside the built environment

Dr Ann Hemingway and Dr Paul Steven from the Centre for Wellbeing and Quality of Life at Bournemouth University look at the importance of creating a supportive environment to encourage people to have the confidence to take risks and move out of their comfort zone.

The essential element of any innovation is the human relationships that enable it to happen and these are the most likely to be left out of any published article sharing process and outcomes. The innovation under consideration here focused on refurbishing an existing area of a University building which had been neglected and was no longer used. The vision behind transforming this space into a workable environment was 'Sustainable wellbeing within the workplace' and aimed to create a physical environment that brought together best evidence on sustainable procurement for

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materials and furniture, and made use of colours, textures and images that would promote wellbeing for those working within. The two main players involved in the refurbishment were academics, one had expertise in relationships between sustainability and wellbeing, and the other was the project leader.

Interestingly, as this project progressed traditional providers routinely employed for building work began to see this project not as something to laugh at or mock but rather by the end they became champions for this vision of 'sustainable wellbeing'. This progression was achieved by influencing beliefs and values as well as building confidence. We focused on those individuals who already had some interest in this area and encouraged them to have the confidence to question their normal practice. We also relied on the underlying principles to be somewhat self-demonstrative: working on the idea that as an environment changes, so do attitudes. Now this space has been created, the influence that it has on people does not go unnoticed. Academics are now organising their own personal work spaces and this project has become influential in terms of how other universities build and refurbish their own buildings.

So what were the principles behind creating a 'sustainable workplace'? We know that certain physical features in the workplace can induce a stress response: a lack of natural lighting and non-opening windows; close-packed uncomfortable seating that invades personal space; or bland, monochrome colour schemes and harsh linear features to name but a few. Once stressed, a person is primed to respond negatively to any subsequent events, making increased errors or reacting adversely to situations normally well within their capabilities. Yet simple changes to a physical environment can help alleviate any stress, making use of inherent responses that we all have. Simple things like making the most of

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working windows which look out onto trees or gardens and displaying artwork with organic shapes all create sensory impressions which have been shown to benefit health, reduce illness and increase positive mood. Even plants in workspaces can improve a person's ability to concentrate on a task, improve the air quality and reduce errors and fatigue. Through using materials such as wood, water-based paints and recycled or reused materials – all more sustainable resources than are commonly used in institutional environments – the process of procurement and renovation (or development of new spaces) is itself more sustainable than the norm. By going further and building on the relationship with existing suppliers, we found surprising enthusiasm and interest when trying to source non-standard materials and furniture. Indeed sharing our growing knowledge on what was achievable in relation to sustainable procurement seemed to further enthuse and motivate the team to focus on our shared vision of sustainable wellbeing within the work environment.

Now the space has been created, it doesn't end there. The aim is to continue to promote pro-sustainability with the clear knowledge that such measures also have a direct positive impact on wellbeing. This issue of wellbeing is now something that is being discussed across the university at all levels. Simple things like flexible working hours can avoid pollution-creating rush-hour traffic and natural lighting and ventilation reduce energy bills and are rated as more pleasant and better for health. As a rule of thumb, environments that are better for humans are those that are ecologically healthy and beneficial for our wellbeing on a local and global scale.[1]

Changes to normal practice may be perceived as requiring extra effort and challenges. However if confidence is built through having a clear vision and

supporting individuals to take risks then the sceptics can themselves become champions. However, this can only be achieved through building relationships and partnerships, nurturing change and innovation – beliefs all too often seen as negative concepts across the National Health Service and higher education sectors where effort only rarely goes into building and supporting the relationships that enable change to happen successfully. Innovation cannot be undertaken without perceived risk, and encouraging others to take risks requires active support strategies: leadership that itself embodies the values being promoted.[2]

Growing 'champions for change' from existing staff and recognising their enthusiasm as an asset which supports innovation (an approach which emerged from a community development background)[3] was successful. The team (from the architect to the painters and decorators and everyone in-between) moved from the 'usual suspects doing the normal stuff' to questioning and interrogating every element of a renovation project in relation to the overarching values guiding it: sustainability and wellbeing. It is important to note also that just influencing some members of the project team (as often happens within NHS-based change) is not enough. The whole team was completely transformed to the extent that future building and renovation projects in the institution are being informed and influenced by these values.

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