

Question and Techniques for Improvement Teams

Phase 1: Goal

Clarify the brief and boundaries of the Improvement Team and establish what the Team will achieve and when it will achieve this by

1.1 For improvements resulting from Self Assessment, the Self Assessment Team will define the improvement project and its output. This becomes Improvement Team's goal. Write the goal on the flipchart and ensure that the Team is completely clear about this goal.

1.2 For Customer Process Reviews, the Improvement Team's goal is to:

Plan and take action to change the way people work, to achieve gradual improvements in customer, staff and partner satisfaction.

These changes in working practice will include changes which.....

- **directly improve customer service**
- **reduce (or remove!) the work which doesn't directly add anything to the customer ('non-value adding work'); this improves the service and reduces the time and cost of providing it**

Ensure that the Improvement Team is clear on the process being reviewed and where this begins and ends (e.g. from initial enquiry to customers leaving). NOTE: the process should always be reviewed from 'end-to-end' (how the customer sees and experiences it) rather than split into separate parts.

Write the goal on the flipchart and ensure the Team is completely clear about this goal.

1.3 Discuss and agree the date when the goal will be completed. Write this on the flipchart.

1.4 Discuss and agree any boundaries, for example:

- **Is the Team able to spend money? If so, how much?**
- **Can the Team do something different from current corporate practice?**
- **Does the Team have to propose changes to anyone? If so, what type of changes have to be proposed and to whom?**
- **Does the Team have to discuss the changes with anyone? If so whom?**

Write these boundaries on the flipchart.

1.5 Avoid discussing areas for improvement or solutions until this phase is completed.

Phase 2: Reality

Analyse the current strengths and areas for improvement, beliefs, causes of the current behaviour and barriers to change

- 2.1. This is the time when those team members inclined to be realistic and analytical (possibly appearing 'negative'!) can have their say! Everyone else must listen carefully and develop an understanding of the issues; these are the realities of the situation.
- 2.2. For Customer Process Reviews, present and discuss your analysis of what is currently happening. Discuss, identify and agree the areas for improvement, for example:

- **What does the service look like through the eyes of the customer?**
- **Where is the non-value adding work?**
- **Which parts of the current practice lead to good service?**
- **Which parts of the current practice do not lead to good service?**
- **Which parts of the current practice could be improved to achieve excellent service?**
- **Which parts of the current practice do not meet Quest Criteria?**
- **Which parts of the current practice do not meeting Council policy or procedure?**
- **What will the benefits be if changes are made in this area?**
- **What would happen if changes are not made in this area?**

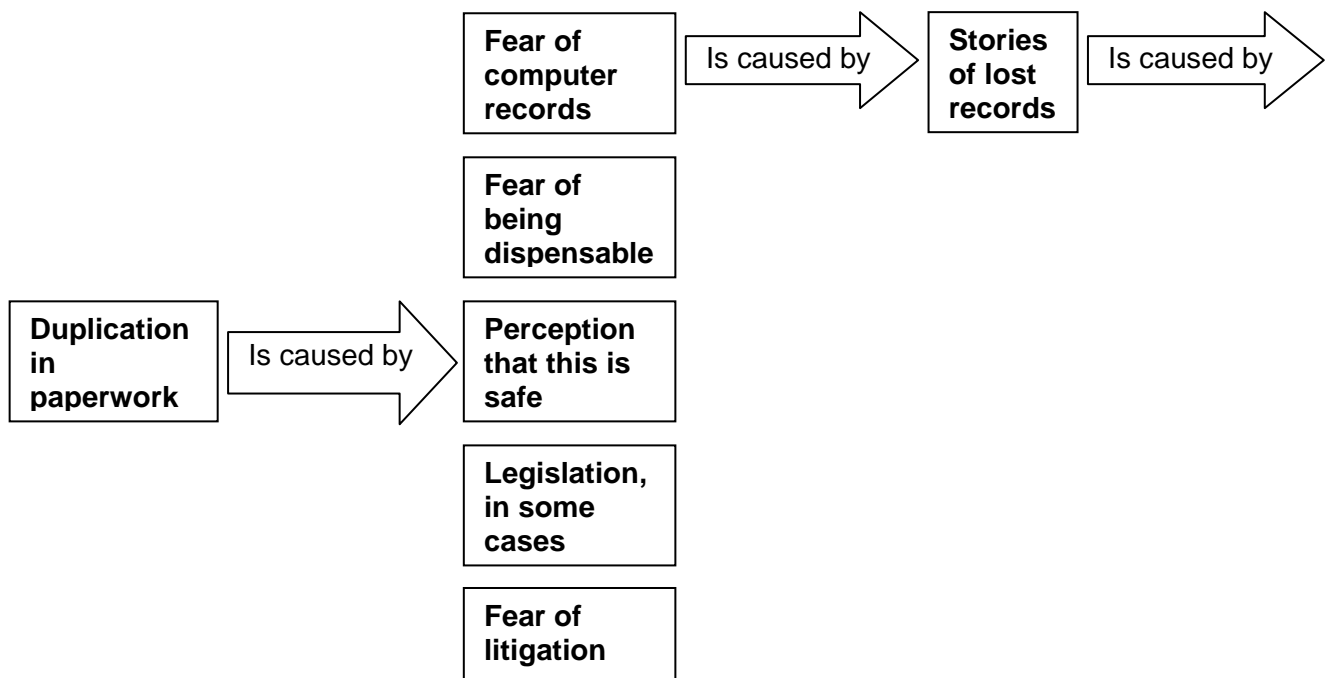
Write the main strengths and areas for improvement these on the flipchart.

- 2.3. For other Improvement Teams, use the Self Assessment Records to discuss and clarify the current strengths and areas for improvement.

2.4. Discuss, analyse and note down the causes of the current behaviour and the barriers to making the changes, for example:

- **What do people believe about the current practices?**
- **What causes these beliefs?**
- **Where have these beliefs come from?**
- **What causes the current behaviour?**
- **What are the barriers to making the changes?**
- **What do people believe about making changes to the current practices?**
- **What causes these beliefs?**

2.5. if you think it is necessary to analyse cause and effect further in order to establish the root cause, use the flipchart and post-it notes, for example:



2.6. If necessary, go away and think further about the issues, discussing them with your colleagues. Bring these thoughts back to the next meeting.

2.7. Avoid discussing solutions until this phase is completed. If any solutions come up, note them & move on.

Phase 3: Options

Come up with creative & innovative ideas for future practices and solutions

- 3.1. This Phase needs people to come up with creative and innovative ideas for future practices (in some cases outside of traditional ways of working) and ways of achieving the changes. There will be some team members who are inclined to think in this way – everyone can think in this way!
- 3.2. The trick with this phase is to allow people time to come up with the solutions – remember there are always solutionsand, given time and help to remove interference, the Team will come up with many! Avoid analysing or commenting on the ideas...it is important that people are free to come up with anything in this phase.
- 3.3. Use recognised Industry best practice to help in identifying improvement ideas; for example from the Quest Managers' Guidance Pack.
- 3.4. Prompt and help the Team members to come up with many ideas, for example:

- **What ideas do you have about this area?**
- **What else? What else?**
- **What could the new system be like?**
- **How could you overcome the barriers to change?**
- **How could the causes of the current behaviour be tackled?**
- **What could be done if there was unlimited time?**
- **What could be done if there was unlimited money?**
- **What organisation would be worth learning from?**
- **Who is a role model in this area....what would they do?**
- **Who would have some good ideas about this?**

3.5. **Silent Mindstorming** is a useful technique to use.....

- Each team member is given a pad of *Post-it Notes* and a flipchart pen
- Each team member thinks of lots of ideas - any ideas are allowed, however simple, complicated, outlandish or 'daft'!
- The team stays silent!
- The team members write each idea in 2 or 3 words on a *Post-it Note*. Still without discussing the ideas, they stick the *Post-it Notes* on to the flipchart (anywhere on a blank sheet)
- The team members continue quickly thinking of ideas and sticking them on the flipchart in silence, using the displayed ideas to stimulate further thinking.
- There must be no comment or analysis of any of the ideas
- When all the ideas have been exhausted, rearrange the ideas into themes.

3.6. A good way of stimulating further innovative thinking is to go and see other organisations (possibly in different industries). This can be on a formal or informal basis (e.g. just using the centre).

3.7. Remember that some ideas might already been suggested (by the Self Assessment Team, other staff or customers). Ensure these are captured before the meeting and feed them into the discussions.

3.8. If necessary, go away from the meeting and ask other members of staff about their ideas (e.g. during a staff meeting). Bring these ideas back to the next Team meeting.

Phase 4: Way Forward

Agree the changes through consensus discussion and plan the detailed actions

4.1. This Phase is in 2 parts and requires 2 different approaches:

- a. All Team members reach a consensus decision on what changes should be made (time for everybody to use their people skills!)
- b. The Team plan the specific actions needed to implement the agreed changes in a detailed, methodical way (some team members will be very keen to move on to actions; now is their time!)

4.2. A consensus decision is one that all team members feel good about; team members should be able to go away from the meeting and actively and honestly support and promote what has been agreed. Consensus is different from 'democracy': where people vote on what they want, leaving some people very unhappy with the verdict! It is also different from persuading everybody else that you ideas are right, or just giving in to the strongest person in the team! A consensus decision comes from the following steps:

- **'Think win/win' (i.e. recognise that you alone do not know the whole picture and that the 'whole is greater than the sum of the parts')**
- **'Seek first to understand then to be understood' (remember that you have 2 ears and 1 mouth and you should use them in this proportion!)**
- **Seek to develop 'synergy' (sharing understanding & energy about the way forward)**

4.3. Help the Team to reach a consensus decision on the what changes should be made, for example

- **Which options would most help you achieve your goal?**
- **Which options would achieve the most improvements**
- **Which options feel best?**
- **Which options are most interesting?**
- **Which options would be most difficult to achieve?**
- **Which options would be the easiest to achieve?**
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how committed are you to these changes?**
- **What would take you to a 10?**

4.4. If the Team cannot reach consensus there are 2 options:

- Go away and think further about the issues, discussing them with your colleagues, and bring back your thoughts to the next meeting
- Give the manager or a nominated person responsibility to make the decision

4.5. When the Team has agreed the changes, map the new process either on the flipchart or on paper.

4.6. Consider and discuss what needs to be done to implement the agreed changes bearing in mind the 'cause and effect' discussed in Phase 2. Consider in detail issues such as:

- Staff re-training
- New or changed supporting paperwork
- Communicating the changes to relevant staff and partners
- New technology
- New equipment
- Wider changes to staff roles

4.7. Prompt and challenge the Team to plan the actions in a detailed way:

What do we need to do to implement the changes and overcome the barriers to change?

- **What is the specific action?**
- **What is the next step? And the next? And the next?**
- **Who will complete each step?**
- **When will you start the action?.....day?.....time? When will you complete the action?**
- **Would could hinder or prevent you from starting?**
- **Who needs to know what these actions are?**
- **How can I help you?**
- **On a scale of 1 – 10, how committed are you to take this action?**
- **What would it take to move you to a 10?**
- **How will these action ns achieve our goal?**

4.8. Record the action, responsibilities and planned completion dates on an Improvement Action Plan and circulate this to all members of the Improvement Team and the management team.

5. Implement, Monitor, Review and Adjust

- 5.1. The Team members will take the agreed actions. The management teams will ensure these actions are taken (as with any other plan).
- 5.2. Arrange a follow-up Improvement Team meeting at which implementation of the changes is discussed. All Team members should maintain awareness of the working practices to see if the changes are happening as planned.
- 5.3. If the changes have not been made systematically, agree and document further actions.
- 5.4. When the Team is satisfied that the changes have been made and the output is achieved, the project is completed.
- 5.5. For Customer Process Reviews, discuss when the next Review will take place for this Process. The management team should record this on the Customer Process Review Schedule.
- 5.6. **The Improvement Team is then disbanded (this is vital)**