Engagement driven approach to process improvement

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The four key ingredients of a happier, more motivated and more productive workforce are:

- leaders with a vision who value how individuals contribute
- line managers who empower rather than control their staff
- values that are lived and not just spoken, leading to a sense of trust and integrity
- employees who have the chance to voice their views and concerns

ACAS - Employee engagement
What is this about?

This report describes a project to develop an approach to process improvement within Higher Education that focuses on people, taking differing perspectives seriously, in an iterative process of improvement to enhance both individual and organisational capability. Key to its success is early and ongoing engagement with staff not as stakeholders but as full members of the improvement team.

The approach brings people together at the beginning of a project and encourages their involvement throughout. It focuses on facilitating discussion, raising awareness of processes, improving communications and building relationships.

Though there is usually agreement that effective and efficient processes enhance the student and staff experience, people often disagree about what constitutes a good process. Debates abound about the relative merits of centralised versus devolved responsibility, how best to achieve flexibility with appropriate levels of control, the balance between empowering process players and compliance with external requirements and the part IT systems play in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Bringing people together to work through these issues in the context of real process reviews creates tensions that have to be managed. However, these tensions generate energy and creativity which, once harnessed, provides the momentum to deliver real improvement. This approach aims to work with and through the tensions rather than trying to eliminate them, to explore how to build on them rather than try to change them.

**Key features of the approach are:**

- strong, active, visible and accessible sponsorship
- a focus on communication and collaboration
- transparency and openness in objectives, discussion and outcomes
- rapid, cumulative and iterative analysis
- shared ownership of both the problems and the solutions
- the bringing together of different perspectives to add value

‘The whole is more than the sum of the individual parts’

What is it not about?

The project did not seek to create a new process improvement methodology. There are already many excellent methodologies and there is no need for another one. This is a way of seeing those methodologies through the lens of engagement, understanding how every step can be enhanced through the active involvement of those directly contributing to and affected by the process under consideration. We have applied this approach to our own process improvement model and believe it can be applied to any model or methodology.

“Good to gain insights from various perspectives and to banish some myths”
What is engagement?

At the outset we sought a definition for the term ‘engagement’ but discovered that there is no single, accepted definition of ‘engagement’.

The MacLeod Review of employee engagement\(^1\), which reported in 2009, found around 50 definitions. Some of these definitions emphasise the individual’s attachment to the job, others to the organisation. However, most focus on engagement as it is demonstrated and exhibited by the employee, exploring what it means to be an engaged employee.

In this project, we focused on engagement from the perspective of the organisation. We sought to establish what an organisation, or more specifically, a University can do to be engaging, and the impact that being an engaging University would have on its ability to improve its processes and, more widely, its ability to manage change.

To support our work we adopted a definition of engagement based on four levels:
- attraction – to interest
- involvement - to draw in
- connection – to bring together
- bond – to build relationships

We have used these levels as references in our selection of engagement practices and they will be used as a means of measuring the effectiveness of our approach.

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1. UCEA Employee Engagement Toolkit [http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/publications/eetoolkit/]

Group discussion, recording comments and identified themes
In May 2014, the University of Hertfordshire launched a process improvement programme, starting with a review of one of our key academic administrative processes, the process to create and amend our taught module descriptions, the ‘Definitive Module Document’ (DMD).

The drivers for the review were twofold:
- to meet our ongoing commitment to value for money, and
- to respond to concerns from staff about workload and bureaucracy

The DMD process was chosen as the first to be reviewed because it was constantly cited by both academic and professional/administrative staff as a cause of frustration.

In our most recent staff satisfaction survey, staff had expressed a desire to be more actively involved in change so the programme sponsor, the Secretary and Registrar, was keen to adopt a different approach based on engagement. We therefore committed to early and ongoing engagement with staff at all levels who were connected with the process. Academic staff included Programme Tutors and Module Leaders who create DMDs and Associate Deans (Academic Quality) who approve them. Professional staff included School-based administrators who monitor the creation of DMDs and centrally based administrators who use the information collected to update the student record system, populate the web-site and support the timetable. As the process under review interacts with University systems, Business Analysts from our IT Department were also active participants.

The process review was led by the Improvement and Planning Office (IPO), a central change team set within the Office of the Vice Chancellor, in partnership with the process owners, the Academic Registry. The team was also supported by academic staff from our Business School who provided expertise, experience and challenge.

The project sponsor set an ambitious time frame for this first review (four months, including the summer break) and adopted an agile approach to rapid problem identification and diagnosis, investigation and analysis.

The review delivered demonstrable improvements to the DMD process. But as importantly, the response from staff involved in the review was overwhelmingly positive. There was a marked increase in the levels of understanding of the end to end process and awareness of the needs of both users and process players.

After reflection, we decided to further develop the approach we had taken and apply this to the rest of the process improvement programme and subsequently to share across the sector.

I think that all the methodologies used to capture information worked well.

Refreshing style and useful to hear the views of people from outside our department.

Good structure that supported discussion - plenty of opportunity to input and to hear other views.
Project aims
The aim of the project was to build on our experiences with the DMD process review to further develop an approach to HE process improvement which:
• is scaleable and transferable to other process improvement projects and change activities
• has, at its heart, the need to understand and meet the needs of students and staff
• facilitates conversations between individuals and teams across the University community who are touched by processes
• encourages staff to take ownership of improvement
• by building confidence and developing skills, empowers those involved to challenge assumptions, champion change and improve their own processes
To support use of the approach, we committed to developing an online toolkit to provide practical guidance to other change practitioners and a route-map to guide users through the toolkit.

Approach and activities

Pilot projects
Given that the engagement driven approach was first developed as a means of addressing a real business problem, we made a clear commitment to continuing its development through practice. Specifically, we sought a number of pilot projects using existing IPO channels and by inviting colleagues from across the University to suggest processes for improvement.

The pilot projects were assessed to ensure they offered a range of different:
• processes
• drivers for improvement and change
• sponsors
• process players
• challenges
• time frames
The pilot projects selected were:
• a review of the University’s new starter (staff member) process
• a review of the University’s procurement process
• a review of the process to handle hazardous materials in a science School
• the implementation of the recommendations from the DMD review
To test its transferability to other forms of change, the University also adopted the approach in a strategic review of one of the University’s key professional departments, the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), which delivers integrated learning resources and IT and computing services.

We also drew on experience gained whilst developing the University’s Strategic Plan 2015-20 for which some of the same techniques were used.
**Project approach**

For each pilot project, a standard process improvement methodology was adopted with activities structured around five stages:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Design</th>
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<th>Sustain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying a sponsor and process owner</td>
<td>• Starting to build the wider team</td>
<td>• Identifying potential solutions</td>
<td>• Effectively putting agreed solutions into practice to ensure adoption and assimilation into the organisation</td>
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<td>• Launching the project</td>
<td>• Gathering information and diagnosing the defects in the process</td>
<td>• Validating and assessing the feasibility of potential solutions</td>
<td>• Sharing results with wider team and across University</td>
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<td>• Agreeing scope and objectives</td>
<td>• Identifying potential solutions</td>
<td>• Agreeing optimum solutions</td>
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<td>• Defining benefits</td>
<td>• Effectively putting agreed solutions into practice to ensure adoption and assimilation into the organisation</td>
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Our pilot project teams focused on four key roles:

- **Sponsor(s)**
  - Understand the wider context, organisational strategy and constraints
  - Provide senior level direction and support

- **Facilitator(s)**
  - Lead the project
  - Act as host (s)
  - Facilitate engagement
  - Provide challenge and arbitration

- **Process users**
  - Articulate personal experiences
  - Provide first hand knowledge of the impact of the process
  - Contribute to diagnosing problems and designing solutions

- **Process Players**
  - Process Owner and Operators
  - Own the outcome
  - Provide first hand knowledge of process and direct experience of the issues faced
  - Play key role in diagnosing and designing solutions
Engagement practices

We committed to putting engagement at the heart of each pilot project, identifying ways in which the value or impact of every project or improvement activity could be increased by engagement. We used a range of different engagement practices, selected according to:

- the stage of the project
- the audience
- the objectives

Workshops

Workshops have always been a key part of the University’s process improvement methodology as a means of gathering information, identifying options and assessing feasibility. However, in the pilot projects they also became opportunities for promoting positive engagement. The workshops were formally ‘hosted’ usually by the facilitator but, sometimes, by the sponsor or the process owner. In developing the ‘host’ role we drew on the work done by Mark McKergow and described in his book ‘Host – Six new roles of engagement’.

One of the key roles of the host was to ensure a safe and mutually supportive environment. Attendance was carefully managed to ensure diverse but balanced roles and perspectives. Care was taken in the planning of the workshops, both in terms of logistics and content, but the events themselves were informal and relaxed. Outputs were recorded using a variety of materials, flipchart, brown paper, table cloths and post-its. They were always freely shared though usually having been photographed rather than ‘typed up’. At the workshops input from users and process players was given equal weight and was non-attributable apart from by role or position.

Strategic review of the Office of the Chief Information Officer

Following the development of its new Strategic Plan, the University initiated a programme of strategic reviews of its professional support Departments. The first of these has been the review of the services, processes and structures of the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) and the engagement driven approach has been adopted throughout.

In the first phase of engagement a number of workshops were held, each focusing on a group of OCIO services. These were attended by both OCIO staff responsible for delivering the services and users of that service, both staff and students. The workshop examined the current services, what works well and what could be improved, and explored the extent to which the services support the University in delivering its Strategic Plan. Discussions were lively and vigorous but respectful and common themes emerged. These themes were explored in a second phase of workshops, again attended by both those delivering and those using the services and through one to one, small and larger group conversations, an unexpected degree of consensus was reached. The different perspectives added to the richness of the outcomes.

3 Host – Six new roles of engagement: Mark McKergow PhD and Helen Bailey
Definitive Module Document (DMD) process review

The DMD process interacts with a wide range of University activities and systems. The review was undertaken to ensure that this procedure continued to be effective and efficient, minimised bureaucracy and supported business needs.

An initial workshop was convened to bring together a wide range of individuals who connected with the DMD process, either directly as academics or as administrators supporting academic quality or as a user of the process, using data to support other University processes, such as recruitment, web page design or central timetabling.

In advance of the workshop we mapped the ‘end to end’ DMD process, at a high level, and gained an understanding of the wider academic quality requirements. Attendees were asked to identify positives and negatives with the existing process and to share these with the improvement team.

The workshop guided attendees through the DMD approval process and asked them, via workshops, to add detail to the ‘end to end’ core process, seeking to capture local experiences and practices. This resulted in an ‘enriched’ process which began to highlight: differing practice from what was perceived to be a common process, overly complex or redundant activity and issues of event timing, which if changed would improve process flow and effectiveness.

The workshop achieved an agenda for change, with general agreement on the priorities for immediate action and medium and longer term change objectives. The additional wider benefits achieved were initiating a different approach to managing change (yielding comments such as “At last, someone has asked me”) and bringing together individuals who all had a role within a process but may never have previously met or directly worked together. This presented opportunities to ‘bust some myths’, highlight the impact on colleagues of local work practices and start further discussions between individuals and teams within the wider process.

“Exceedingly good interaction. This is a good way to communicate. We must retain this process after our review”

“Thought the process was clear, fair and well facilitated”
Drop-in sessions

Drop-in sessions became a key feature of the pilot projects. They brought benefits not only to the specific project but also helped to promote the engagement driven approach more widely. Drop-in sessions were rarely used in isolation but offered an open forum to reflect, explore, validate and challenge results from other events and engagement practices (such as workshops, surveys, one to one interviews). The drop-in sessions were held in a range of different places; sometimes they were set in open spaces such as corridors and foyers to attract ‘passers-by’ and sometimes they were held in meeting rooms. Facilitators were always available to ‘meet and greet’ attendees and to explain the format of the event but material was designed to be self-explanatory. Attendees were invited to contribute by responding to direct, sometimes quite provocative, questions or by adding a post-it to an existing flipchart or poster. Their contributions were public but largely anonymous and unattributed. If a number of people were gathered in one place facilitators encouraged impromptu conversations, many of which generated sometimes heated and often prolonged debate.

Procurement process review

During the review of the procurement process drop-in sessions were convened as a follow-up to an online survey of individuals who interacted with the process. The online survey had generated useful feedback on services and presented an opportunity for individual comment. The drop-in sessions enabled the improvement team to play-back the headline issues obtained via the survey and to check understanding, to identify whether issues were common experiences or local concerns and to gather any additional detail or comments.

The drop-in sessions produced very useful feedback on how central processes impacted at a local level and highlighted some communication and development needs. Equally, the discussions revealed some local practices and record keeping which duplicated functionality available from the purchasing system. This highlighted the need for further research in some areas to understand why this was happening.

Development of the University’s Strategic Plan

As part of the development of the University’s Strategic Plan we held a programme of drop-in sessions for staff and students over a period of 9 months. These were hosted by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and were held at different times and in different locations across the campus. The drop-in sessions were unscripted but at each the outcomes of previous engagement events were presented and the ‘story of the strategy’ was brought up to date. Attendees were given the opportunity to contribute, to challenge or merely to reflect on the issues raised.

“It was good to see what users and other technical staff thought of the services I provide – even the bad stuff!”
Display
It became standard practice to display the outputs of our engagement events and the subsequent team analysis in either the process owner’s work area or in a public shared space. Initially this was for practical reasons – to enable team members, process players and users to see progress and to prove that the process was open and transparent. However, as the projects progressed the displays became the focus for un-facilitated, personal or spontaneous group reflection. The displays were added to and enabled the story of the improvement to be built up cumulatively over time. This helped to embed the change and operationalise the process improvement activity. It also generated interest among other visitors who were neither involved in nor related to the process and provided opportunities for value-added conversations.

Definitive Module Document (DMD) process review
The DMD process review made large scale use of post-its, brown paper and flip charts to map the end-to-end process. This visual approach ensured that a process had been fully detailed and understood and also enabled ‘standing-back’, reflection and review. Using this ‘low tech’ approach also enabled engagement by a wider range of individuals with differing levels of technical expertise.

All outputs from engagement events were photographed and posted to a shared area on the University network to allow further re-reading of charts and notes by attendees or viewing by a wider audience. Process maps, pictures or flip charts were also displayed in open areas accessible to process players to provide them with the opportunity to read and add any further comments.

Display became a technique used not only to capture and share the output from the review process but also to create resources to maintain interest and engagement and to facilitate the recording of belated thoughts, clarifications or wider comment.

“Good to hear other people’s experiences, helped me to expand my own understanding”
Team meetings

In all our pilot projects we used existing team or functional networks as opportunities for engagement. Team meetings led by the process owner were used as vehicle for reporting progress and generating discussion. These were particularly useful for assessing the impact of potential solutions on other related processes and for embedding improvements into the existing organisational structure. Facilitators became familiar figures at these meetings and relationships formed have been carried over into subsequent operational and change work.

New starter process review

As part of the new starter process review we attended a number of team meetings. To ensure we made the best use of the time available we met in advance with the process owner (who was also the manager) to agree the aim of the meeting, the time required and relationship with other agenda items.

The purpose of the engagement was to allow for open conversation that drew upon each person’s knowledge, skills and perspectives and to encourage process players to support each other in accomplishing collective goals. Participants felt more comfortable in the safe environment of a team meeting than in wider engagement events.

Through the meetings we gained knowledge of the areas which needed improving and the best way to implement and embed the change. We also gained insight into the dynamics of the team which proved valuable as the review progressed and further changes were identified.

Observation-led conversations

Observing process players is a recognised way of gaining knowledge and understanding of a process and of the challenges faced. In our pilot projects, we built on this technique to encourage the process player being observed to reflect on their own contribution to the process. It acknowledged the expertise of the individual and encouraged them to identify issues and design solutions from their own perspective. The conversations were particularly valuable in engaging with process players who had seemed reluctant to get involved in the review in other ways.

New starter process review

The new starter process was mapped at engagement workshops with process players and users. This allowed us to clearly establish how the process operated both centrally within the HR Department and across the University. The process mapping highlighted a number of ‘pinch-points’ created either by demand and availability of resource or by variability in the quality of information received, which resulted in tasks being delayed, repeated or reworked.

We used observation to improve our understanding of these ‘pinch points’ and, more importantly, to see them from the process players’ perspective. Using a structured conversation and data collection template, the detailed process steps were observed, discussed and documented. This enabled both the observer and process player to establish ways in which IT systems might be better used to improve efficiency, the extent to which checks carried out were necessary and the efficiency and timeliness of information transfer between and within teams. This identified a number of changes that could be quickly introduced. It also contributed to gaining the confidence of process players and empowering them to take ownership of the outcomes.
Good experience, with lots of good views.
Senior level conversations

At the outset and at regular intervals throughout the projects we held scheduled and structured conversations with key players, primarily with sponsors and process owners. The early conversations provided opportunities to outline responsibilities and share expectations and concerns. They were also critical in understanding the perspectives of different players and their objectives for the project. Later conversations provided a forum for reviewing progress, for reflecting on the messages emerging from the engagement and prioritising future activities.

Hazardous materials safety procedure review

The review of hazardous materials safety policy and procedures had a clear sponsor, the Director of Occupational Health and Safety, and a process owner, the Head of Pharmacy and Chair of the School of Life and Medical Sciences Safety Committee.

Meetings were held with both individuals at the outset of the review. The discussions with the sponsor established an initial view of the scope and timescales of the review and identified key players. They also importantly explored, from the sponsor’s perspective, the issues associated with the process.

The meeting with the process owner echoed the sponsor’s approach but also highlighted an additional area of concern. The process owner believed that the business needs of researchers and academics required a process which, whilst ensuring compliance and safety, minimised the barriers to teaching, commercial and research activities. The process owner cited examples of practice from other academic institutions and the commercial research sector, which seemed less bureaucratic than equivalent University of Hertfordshire policies and procedures. To explore further this difference in emphasis, structured conversations have taken place with process players (those individuals who are directly involved with managing safety processes) and users (those who are required to engage with and comply with the processes).

These conversations have enabled the improvement team to ensure clarity, to reach agreement on the scope and purpose of the review and, importantly, to avoid a potential split within the leadership of the review.

Surveys

In discussion with the sponsor and process owner of one of our pilot projects, the review of the University’s procurement process, it became clear that the process touched most of, if not all, University staff in some way. We therefore realised we needed a way of engaging quickly and effectively with a large group of process players and users. Online surveys are a common tool for collecting information from an identified group of people but they can sometimes feel impersonal. There is also a risk that people selected may not be representative and that structured questions may constrain the responses provided.

To mitigate this risk, we involved process players in identifying the survey recipients and designing the questions and we tested the questions on representative users. The survey included free text boxes to allow respondents to go beyond the structured questions. We subsequently used as the results as a starting point for stimulating conversation and reflection at drop-in sessions or workshops. Though responses were anonymous, survey respondents were invited to attend drop-in sessions to discuss their views and thus become part of the wider improvement team.

Procurement process review

A Bristol Online Survey was targeted at 250 individuals who had some form of contact with University procurement, either by raising a purchase request, placing a purchase order, approving an order or receiving a delivery. This target audience was selected for two reasons:

- They already had some experience, and views, of University procurement
- They had expressed an interest in achieving improvements to a service they use

Those surveyed were asked a small number of specific questions about their individual experiences of the University procurement services, and asked to identify both positive features and areas for improvement. The survey achieved a response rate of more than 50% and provided useful feedback which was subsequently used as discussion starters at drop-in sessions. As a result, many of the survey respondents became key players in the wider team.
Challenging a particular point in the process

More formal meeting table discussion to discuss a given topic to report back in a plenary session
Key findings

1. The engagement driven approach should not be seen as an easy option:

The reaction of participants in both the pilot projects and other change initiatives for which we adopted the approach was almost overwhelmingly positive once the engagement was underway. However, in the early stages of the projects, there was some concern and at times anxiety particularly by process owners and process players at the prospect of engaging in events directly with users. Even where there was agreement over the need for improvement, there was reluctance to expose themselves and their process to the ‘public gaze’. While most process players who had previously been involved in improvement projects accepted the need for user input, they still felt some trepidation attending workshops alongside their users. There was a sense of ‘you ask them what they think, then tell us’. This was addressed in a number of ways:

• by encouraging process players to share their concerns with each other and with sponsors and process owners

• by providing process players with the opportunity to reflect on the process before the wider engagement began

• by creating a safe environment for engagement

2. Strong, visible and accessible sponsorship is critical:

Effective sponsorship is important for any improvement project. However, we found that strong, visible and accessible sponsorship was essential for the success of an engagement driven project. By demonstrating active commitment to engagement, sponsors set the tone and mood of the review. Sponsors had to be clear and decisive in setting direction, agreeing objectives and defining scope. However, they also had to be willing and able to adapt and flex these if the results of the engagement required it. They had to ensure momentum was maintained but also be prepared to slow things down if the engagement took the review in an unexpected but valuable direction. Conversely, sponsors at times had to bring the project back on track if the engagement took the agenda in a direction that did not add value.

3. The approach leads to a shared responsibility, shared leadership and shared ownership of process improvement:

Adopting the engagement driven approach engendered a sense that responsibility for the success of the pilot improvement projects was shared between the sponsor, the process owner and the facilitator, and more fundamentally between the process players and the users. At every engagement event this shared responsibility was emphasised. With this shared responsibility came a sense of shared leadership and ultimately a sense of shared ownership of the final outcomes of the review. The final outcomes were not seen as an articulation of the agenda of the sponsor based on their analysis of a consultation, but rather as agreed change as it is had emerged through the engagement process (in which, of course, the sponsor was a key player). This called for a different type of involvement from the sponsor, and also an acceptance that they do not have all, or indeed most, of the answers.
4. A different type of team model is needed:

The strength of the team has proved a key factor in the success of the pilot projects. Over the course of the pilot projects we developed a model of team working which was based on the concept of:

- the core team – those directly involved in the improvement project, and
- the wider team – those who engaged with the project in any way.

The core teams met regularly and formally progressed the improvement activity. The wider teams were invited to contribute as much as they were able, given their other responsibilities. This included attendance at events, providing ad hoc feedback and reviewing documentation. They were kept informed of progress on a regular basis, unless and until they chose to ‘disengage’ from the project. This model of team working was, at times, resource intensive for the core team but invaluable in maintaining levels of interest and providing access to the expertise of users and process players.

Within this new team model we also introduced the concept of ‘volunteer partners’. Volunteer partners were colleagues from across the University who expressed an interest in contributing to the improvement process. With the agreement of their line managers, volunteer partners were invited to support each pilot project in a range of ways, providing a sounding board for the core team on both the process improvement and the engagement activities.

5. The approach requires investment of time and energy:

The success of the approach, both in terms of quality of outcome and level of engagement, was significantly influenced by the investment of time and energy by process players and the involvement of interested and informed users. Engagement, whether it be attending workshops or taking part in informal conversations takes time and it was important that process players, particularly those who were more junior, felt empowered to invest this time and felt that their contribution was both valued and valuable. The active support of sponsors and process owners was key to this. Process players also needed to understand the benefits to themselves of the review.

“Enjoyed sharing ideas and experiences with colleagues from across the University”
6. Behaviours based on respect and understanding are essential:

A key feature of the approach is bringing together users and process players in the same place at the same time and channelling the energy created by the conversations that ensue to drive improvement. However, for this to be a constructive experience, engagement must take place in a controlled and safe environment. We found that this environment was supported by the adoption of a shared set of rules for engagement. These simple and easily understood rules were explicitly referenced at every formal event and were implicit in every engagement interaction.

This ensured that all participants felt comfortable and able to contribute. At some events the sponsor or process owner played the role of ‘expert witness’. The role of the expert witness was to:

- listen and observe
- provide advice and guidance where required
- reflect on what was being said

This was particularly important where the sponsor or process owner was the line manager of some or all of the participants of the engagement event.

7. Engagement driven projects offer particular management challenges:

Our pilot projects demonstrated that managing an engagement driven project holds particular challenges and often requires an approach which could be considered counter-intuitive for project managers.

‘Scope ripple’
As always, teams worked hard in the initiation stage of the pilot projects to clearly define the scope of the project and agree this with sponsors and process owners. Usually, the scope would remain throughout the project or at least, it would be subject to strict change control. However, engagement often led the project into areas previously considered out of scope. We allowed this to happen where it added value to ensure users’ and process players’ voices were being heard. We termed this ‘scope ripple’ to distinguish it from ‘scope creep’.

Open gateways
Our usual process improvement methodology is structured around five discrete stages. In these projects, these stages became almost irrelevant. Users and process players were unconcerned about which stage we were in and ignored the formality of ‘gateways’. If asked to discuss a process, they were likely not only to diagnose problems but also to offer solutions and suggest ways of implementing and embedding them. It would have been perverse to expect them to save their contributions until the next stage of the project. This is particularly true when engaging with people who are busy or senior (or both) where opportunities to engage may be limited.

Keeping the show on the road
The impact of this iterative, fluid model of working could have been a loss of control over scope, objectives and timescales. It was critical that progress towards objectives was maintained. If timescales slip or deadlines are missed, the energy and goodwill generated by the engagement could be lost. A balance must be struck between allowing the engagement time to reap benefits and losing momentum. This is primarily the responsibility of the facilitator but the sponsor can play a key role in this by providing direction, support and encouragement.

Rules for engagement
Success depends on our full participation – we share responsibility for the outcome of this workshop

- Share original, personal thoughts and generate ideas together
- Stay on topic
- Focus on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ rather than the ‘who’
- Keep input constructive and respectful
- Be aware of – and open to - different views and different perspectives
- Feel free to take away and share what’s said but don’t attribute to any individual colleague
- Ask questions any time
8. The driver for improvement is a key factor in the success of engagement:

From an engagement point of view, the most successful of our pilot projects were those in which user or process player dissatisfaction with a process was the driver for the improvement. In these projects, both users and process players readily and actively engaged from the outset, contributing enthusiastically to the diagnosis of issues and the design of solutions. Events were well attended and energy levels were maintained throughout.

Where the driver for change was a need to ensure compliance or address resource issues, engagement was more of a challenge both in terms of quantity (such as numbers of people attending events and volume of responses) and quality (richness of discussion, energy, value of contribution). More effort was required to encourage a sense of ownership of the outcome among wider process players. Expectations had to be managed more carefully in terms of solutions and it was more difficult to balance the perspectives of the sponsor, process owner and wider community. However, the wider benefits of encouraging engagement remained significant.

“Enjoyable and beneficial process, good to hear the views of both service providers and service users”

“I think the sessions are useful to get ideas and suggestions heard in a more collaborative environment”

Adding comments and additional information to a skeleton process
Resources and tools

The on-line toolkit to support the use of the approach can be found at the IPO page of the University of Hertfordshire website www.herts.ac.uk. This contains practical guidance and resources focused on setting up and running an engagement driven project, the key roles within the team and a range of engagement practices. The toolkit also contains a route-map to navigate the user through the tools.

Next steps

The toolkit has been designed for use by those involved in process improvement and wider change at the University of Hertfordshire and across the sector. As our understanding of the approach grows and as the toolkit is used, we will add new tools and revise existing ones.

Anecdotal evidence shows that the approach has delivered effective process improvement and realised wider organisational benefits. In the coming months as pilot projects are completed, we will conduct formal evaluation.

Immediate activity will focus on evaluating the extent to which this approach has succeeded in:

- attracting people into process improvement and wider change
- involving them in diagnosis, design, implementation and embedding of improvement
- connecting people who have a mutual interest in the process and the outcome
- creating relationships which last beyond the improvement project

Over a longer period, we believe there is value in assessing how continued use of the approach can have a fundamental effect on our attitude to change, creating an `engaging University’.

We welcome your feedback on this report and the toolkit by email to ipo@herts.ac.uk
Really enjoyed the interactive discussions and activities

Exercise to identify where, on a timeline, you begin to engage with a process
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