What is the engagement driven approach to process improvement?

The engagement driven approach focuses on people, acknowledges their different perspectives and uses these to enhance individual and organisational capability. Key to the approach is early and ongoing engagement with students and staff (both academic and professional/administrative) not as stakeholders but as full members of the improvement team.

The approach brings people together at the beginning of the 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, there can be disagreement about what constitutes an efficient and effective process. Bringing people together to work through issues in the context of real process reviews creates tensions that have to be managed. However, these tensions generate energy 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: as in the saying attributed to Aristotle “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”.

The approach:
- is scaleable and transferable to other types of improvement and change
- has, at its centre, 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 the same processes
- encourages managers and staff to take ownership of the improvement agenda
- by building confidence and developing skills, empowers those involved to challenge assumptions and champion change.

However, the approach should not be viewed as an easy option. It requires investment of time, effort, energy and commitment from all participants and an acceptance that those closest to a process, both process players and users are best placed to improve it. The approach is best used when:
- there is the time, the resource and the opportunity to engage fully
- there is an appetite to do something different to effect change, and
- there is a willingness and a desire to maximise input from a wide range of stakeholders.

It is more challenging when:
- there are externally or internally imposed time or budget constraints
- the outcome of the change is largely predetermined by legislative changes, regulatory authority mandates, organisational pressures or system constraints, or
- there is limited support or expertise to provide wide engagement.