Engaging through workshops

Workshops are a means of gathering information, identifying and exploring options, assessing feasibility, and are a key part of process improvement. They also offer an opportunity to promote positive engagement.

Workshops can either be 'hosted' by the facilitator, the sponsor or process owner. Using methodologies to visually map out the process, workshops offer the opportunity for sponsors, process owners, process players and users to have conversations and reflect in a neutral and safe environment. Attendance at workshops can either be by invitation or by self-nomination but the success of the approach relies on gathering a mix of perspectives.

**Pros and cons**

**Pros**
- Potential to reach a wider audience
- Offers safe environment for process players and users to work together
- Opportunity to exchange, share and challenge views and ideas
- Can encourage open and honest conversations

**Cons**
- Requires significant preparation and design time
- Availability of participant's time
- Availability of suitable space and rooms
- Some participants may be reluctant to share their views and opinions in front of others
- Impact of ‘hidden agendas’, which may jeopardise workshop success.

**Hints and tips**

- Ensure a safe and mutually supportive environment.
- Be clear about the purpose of the workshop.
- Take care in the planning and preparation.
- Encourage attendance by communicating dates and venues a few weeks before the sessions.
- Ensure representation from a diverse population (roles, grades, gender, ethnicity).
- Book space that is accessible to a broad range of people and supports the style of workshop you want to deliver.
- Manage expectations - not every idea and opinion can be adopted.
- Capture the views, ideas or suggestions for improvements of all participants.
- Record outputs using a variety of materials such as flipchart, brown paper, post-it notes.
- Visually map out the process so participants can easily contribute.
- At the workshop treat all contributions, from both users and process players, as equally valuable.
- Unless otherwise agreed, ensure anonymity by not attributing comments.
- Be mindful in group work that the voices of quieter individuals are not lost.
- Ensure there are sufficient facilitators to ask questions, to stimulate conversation and reflection.
- Take time to decipher and analyse the outputs from the sessions, do not attribute your views or ideas to the comments.
- Look for key themes emerging from the outputs, which may either challenge assumptions or require further investigation.