

Alignment and Simplification – how Lean/ business improvement can support mergers and partnerships between housing organisations

2 + 2 = 5

One of the key objectives of any merger or partnership is realising the benefits are more than the sum of the individual parts. Service Matters understands that realising these benefits requires effective management of staff engagement throughout the process, especially when emotions are heightened.

Using a people-focused mind-set and simple to use Lean tools and techniques, Service Matters is able to bring frontline teams together to focus on improving service delivery to customers. The key principles we adopt are:

- **The Customer is King** – Concentrate on what matters most to customers. The impact on the customer journey focuses teams on an outside-in perspective.
- **Celebrate difference whilst moving to a shared vision** – In the short-term teams delivering the same service in different organisations could be operating differently; celebrating innovation and best practice is crucial before looking at moving to common ways of working.
- **You don't need to tell staff to improve** – Frontline staff will take opportunities to improve the delivery of services, especially if it cuts out waste, problems and frustrations. Build momentum based on quick wins as it helps to drive an improvement culture.
- **Senior buy-in is crucial, senior interference is damaging** – Trust your teams to do what is right by remembering to adopt an agile approach to implementation and learn from mistakes. Managers have a key role in taking an open-minded approach to ideas and suggestions from teams.
- **Build a culture of engagement, enthusiasm and fun** – We work hard to build relationships between teams – provide the right environment to allow sharing of ideas, challenge and innovation.
- **Turkeys won't vote for Christmas** - Take the difficult decisions quickly and be honest about how planned efficiencies will be realised. Everyone realises that job roles change but fear kills enthusiasm.

Stronger together Case Study

ISOS and Cestria, two housing organisations within the North East, came together to form the new ISOS Group in October 2014. The objectives for this exercise can be summed up in their strapline of “stronger together”. Progress had already been made in a number of work streams taking advantage of opportunities to align ways of working.



In March 2015, Service Matters was asked to use its expertise in engaging staff in Lean activity to support the alignment of frontline services and helping with preparations for the procurement of a single housing management ICT system.

A series of workshops were held with frontline teams and managers to enable staff to work together. We looked at where common processes could be developed and ultimately which ICT system would be best for the new ISOS group. The approach adopted by Service Matters consisted of:

- Gaining consensus about what matters most to customers
- Mapping the current state of each process by each individual organisation, identifying what happens now (warts and all), system interfaces and opportunities for improvement (takeaways)
- “Show and Tell” workshops were facilitated to provide an opportunity for teams to share best practice and to problem solve shared issues
- Building consensus on the vision for the future for each service; looking at the “art of the possible” focusing on the digital agenda

“Service Matters generated a positive and relaxed atmosphere that engaged our teams in a focus on improving service delivery to customers. The approach taken by Service Matters demonstrated their considerable experience in working across the commercial and housing sectors. In particular their empathy with frontline staff was a particular strength” Staff member at ISOS

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