

# processfix

Winter newsletter 2016

## Welcome

As we draw to the end of an unprecedented year of change both in the UK and abroad, why not take the opportunity to reflect on past activities and prepare to build on that learning as you continue your process improvement journey in 2017.

This quarter we examine the role of the process improvement champion. First, Angela Milln shares with us her experiences at the University of Bristol having championed several Processfix workshops on student recruitment and admissions.

Then we report from the recent Operational Excellence Network meeting. Organised by Processfix and hosted by King's College London, it brought together over 60 process improvement champions. Participants' success stories, challenges and solutions were shared and discussions held about what went well, what could have been done differently and what advice would be given to similar projects.

These experiences highlight the importance of the 'Improvement Champion' role. The driver for change will vary from organisation to organisation, but many of the challenges remain the same. We hope that you will be inspired by reading these examples to champion your own process improvement, whatever changes your organisation may be facing.

## NEWSFLASH!

**Marlow, UK – November 2016**  
Johnson & Johnson streamline NHS England Health Technology Appraisal process



## Reflections of a process improvement champion



Angela Milln championed several Processfix workshops at the University of Bristol, including undergraduate admissions and the applicant enquiry service, launched in September 2016.

"The nature of recruitment and admissions services is that there is always an ongoing need to improve processes, to make them more efficient and more customer focused; bluntly, to keep ahead of the competition. That is particularly true right now in Higher Education. It is important to put the emphasis on our applicants and prospective applicants and make sure that whatever we are doing meets their needs."

At Bristol, with its strong academic reputation, recruitment has traditionally done well. But over the past few years, the external environment has become more competitive. Angela explained how this has changed attitudes: "Cumbersome processes can get in the way of meeting an applicant's needs. Turning the handle on complicated administrative work, rather than focusing on applicants as customers, is the wrong approach. We needed to think about the person on the receiving end of our service."

"Whilst many of our academic community had started to take a customer orientated approach, this tended to be within

a departmental silo; not joined up with anything offered elsewhere in the university. As a result, an applicant may have felt that the information they were receiving was quite disjointed.

## "you need the courage to be tough, to take some risks"

Each Processfix workshop provided a forum within which people could have a focused cross-team conversation. Academic and professional services colleagues were able to add their perspective and be heard, but also work out for themselves the importance of fitting with others and decide together how things need to look to the customer. This collaborative approach has continued after the workshops. It is not so much that conversations between academic, recruitment and admissions professionals

have become more frequent, but that the nature of the conversations is different."

Looking specifically at the undergraduate admissions process, Angela noted that there has been a tangible improvement since the Processfix workshop: "One of the big challenges was moving towards a paperless admissions process. I remember so clearly that, having done all the work to identify how to achieve this, the team still felt it was too risky. This caution was overcome and now no-one can imagine why we ever had so many piles of paper. You can also see a change in overall approach. The admissions team now has the discipline between cycles of work to look back, review and systematically work out what further improvements are needed."

Angela went on to note that this same attitude is now starting to surface in the enquiries team: "The walk-in enquiry centre has just opened and you can already see that it has opened up the possibility of reviewing processes again, as it creates a different dynamic and operating environment. It is early days, but there is great potential to further re-evaluate and improve our service."

We asked Angela how the teams have maintained momentum following the workshops: "Once on the journey to process improvement, as a leader you need to recognise the need to step back a little. Change and continuous improvement need to be owned by everybody and to become their culture. The key players at Bristol have been the individual team leaders and their team members. You also need to be open-minded. It is important not to be too defensive about previous habits."

Angela concluded that as the person championing process improvement, you need to be prepared to take some flack: "A lot of people are working 'in the moment' and will find excuses not to engage. You don't want to move things forward without listening, but you need the courage to be tough, to take some risks."

# King's College London host Third Annual Operational Excellence Network meeting, November 2016

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Efficiency, effectiveness and value for money; the contribution of process improvement. This was the theme of the latest networking meeting hosted by King's College London at the Anatomy Museum.

**"It was absolutely fantastic to welcome people from 37 different organisations to this event, which over the last three years has grown from 10 to more than 60 process improvement champions."** Jules Cross, Managing Director, Processfix.

## Sharing experiences and best practice

After coffee and croissants, during which attendees had the chance to catch up with old colleagues and meet some new ones, Jules opened the meeting and introduced Tessa Harrison, Director of Students and Education at King's College London who was kindly hosting the event this year.

Tessa shared with the group her experience of arriving at King's two years ago and how she approached the need to put students first. She was honest and open about the issues faced by King's, but didn't leave the group feeling negative. Instead, she demonstrated how King's had invested in a clear definition of what success would look like in three years and identified their plans to overcome the challenges faced.

These challenges were summed up as pace vs patience: getting the balance of what you want to achieve versus what is possible; permission: overcoming the "we've always done it this way"; and politics: the Senior Leadership Team needs to be on board, otherwise it will fail at the first hurdle.

**"It's not just what you do, it's how you do it. You can do a lot of process improvement in some areas, but why not develop a strategic approach to it?"** Tessa Harrison, Director of Students and Education, King's College London.

Questions from the audience sought clarification about the number of staff involved and asked how to identify process improvement champions and to engage existing staff in the challenge. A frequently occurring question explored how to work with IT. At King's, Tessa explained that there was a great relationship with IT, whose activity map has been aligned with continuous process improvement, resulting in an effective fit.

Following this constructive question and answer session, Keith Harrison, College Secretary and Clerk to the Governors at Birkbeck, took to the

podium to inform the group about the particular challenges faced by a specialist provider of evening university education and how technology fits within their process improvement approach. He used the analogy that technology is not the only piece of a game, but rather just one part of a jigsaw. The challenge is to get all the jigsaw pieces to work together.

**"Technology is a force for good; it's the people we need to solve."** Keith Harrison, College Secretary and Clerk to the Governors, Birkbeck

Most often, Keith explained, technology is thought to be the solution, as the other part is the hard part. The part that needs you to ask questions about what is really important, what makes you tick as an institution? Only then can the technology piece fit snugly within the jigsaw.





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## Welcoming Professor Sir Ian Diamond

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Jules was delighted to introduce Professor Sir Ian Diamond to the group. Sir Ian is Vice-chancellor of the University of Aberdeen and Chair of the Universities UK Task Group on Efficiency.

**“We are actually very good as a sector.”**

Sir Ian delivered a clear picture that universities in the UK are an important part of the UK infrastructure, have retained their effectiveness over time and are critical to supporting UK economic growth.

**“We need to get better at explaining what we’re doing and at sharing best practice.”**

Sir Ian proposed that data should be considered a strategic asset. Information is available everywhere, but needs to be used properly and by people with the right skill sets. Examples he used were learning analytics and the student experience: understanding where students are at any time, and how much they are engaging. He went on to explain how this data can be interrogated to identify anomalies or significant changes in patterns and isolate why they have occurred. In this way, data can be used to identify and deliver efficiencies.

Measuring and reporting on efficiency was also seen to be a crucial part of communicating how well universities are doing in terms of delivering value for money. However, Sir Ian cautioned that there is no “one size fits all”, rather that there is a basket of goods being used around the UK and that each institution needs to look at what works for them.

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## “Pace vs Patience”

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### Championing process improvement

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With thanks to all our contributors: Christine Abbott, formerly COO at Birmingham City University and now CEO of Ambitious Futures; Chris Ince, Secretary at SOAS; Darren Wallis, Director of Strategic Programme Delivery at the University of Warwick; Miriam Moir, Principal Registrar at Buckinghamshire New University; James Smith, Director of Process Improvement and Corporate Information Systems; and Katherine Bock, Head of Governance and Corporate Support at Birkbeck.

A lively hour was spent with poster contributors both informing and entertaining their peers

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## Plenary session: the contribution of process improvement

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The panel was composed of speakers Tessa and Keith, Mark Ricketts, Director of Process Improvement at the University of Bath and Stephen Marshall, Secretary and Registrar of the University of the Arts, London.

A selection of the questions posed and answers given is presented below.

**There are lots of areas needing process improvement. How do you prioritise which areas to work on?**

Responses included starting with a staff survey or using the priorities identified at a Processfix Champions workshop. All considered the benefits and difficulties involved, whether through a formal business case or considering more tactical issues. Senior management was often brought in as the final decision maker based on the information provided.

**Do you use Rapid Improvement Workshops exclusively, or combine them with other approaches?**

Feedback was that the main principles of the Processfix three-day workshops are followed, but that practically it is not always possible, particularly when involving academics, to get the commitment of time. Adjustments are made according to need, for example, by omitting the simulation day when participants have been to previous workshops, or breaking the three days over three weeks rather than one.

**How do you change institutional governance to support process improvement?**

The involvement and on-boarding of senior leadership and governors was seen as vital, in whatever form it was achieved. Birkbeck manage their process from a small executive group, while King’s use a Processfix Roadmap which has been customised to their existing structures and way of doing things and this prioritised the changes to governance needed to support continuous improvement. At UAL, getting a mandate from all those needed to promote and support process improvement was mandatory. At Bath, this is an ongoing activity. Focusing on matrices was also mentioned as an important factor: how to record and translate outcomes into financial benefits.

about the projects and challenges they have faced, discussing the solutions they had developed and implemented and how they had measured and reported on success.

The audiences were proactive in their questioning and linked this to their own experiences, thus providing a useful forum for thought development.

*If you would like to join the Operational Excellence Network please contact our network coordinator [jenny.hocking@processfix.com](mailto:jenny.hocking@processfix.com)*

## About us

Organisations rely on processes to get things done. Often these simply evolve over time and become inefficient ways of working. Processfix bring powerful, proven and behaviour-changing techniques to bear in a professionally facilitated environment.

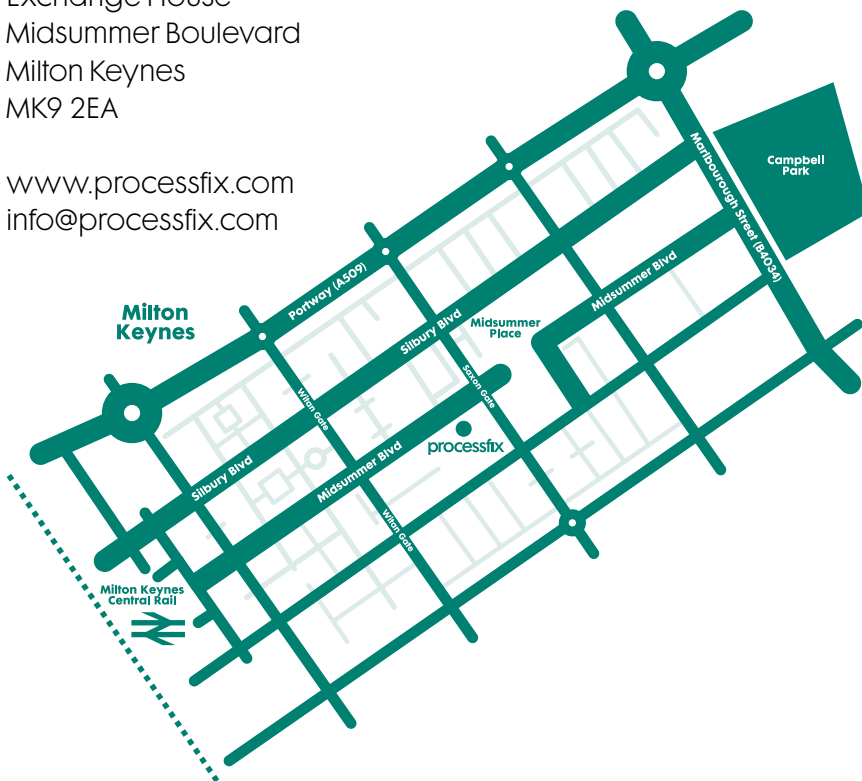
We focus on engaging your teams in their own improvement, empowering them to re-evaluate the way they do things and to develop new and improved ways of working that transform performance and deliver immediate results.

Whether you require Rapid Improvement Workshop facilitation, training, project leadership or an organisational wide process improvement programme. Processfix specialise in facilitating your team, delivering immediate benefits and instilling continuous improvement across your organisation.

## If you would like to find out how Processfix can benefit your organisation, please contact us at:

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## And Finally...

Crisis, the UK national charity for single homeless people, start the New Year with Processfix.



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[www.processfix.com](http://www.processfix.com)

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