

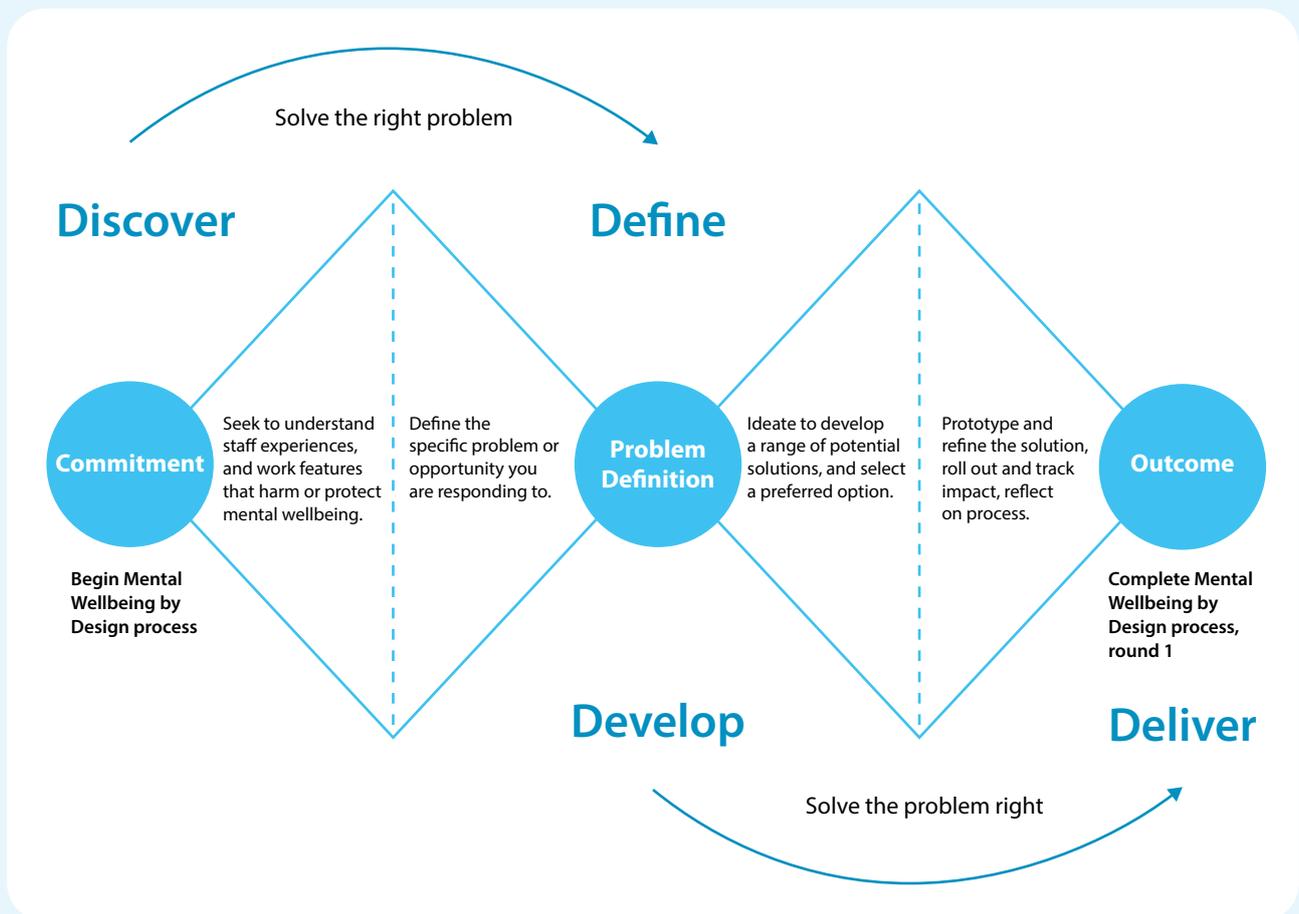
Case study: AsureQuality

Redesigning work: A user guide to shift
from surviving to thriving



AsureQuality is a state-owned enterprise that offers a broad range of food assurance services. We were one of three 'early adopter' organisations, who sought to redesign an aspect of work in order to improve the mental wellbeing of our people, as part of the Forum's *Redesigning Work: A user guide to shift from surviving to thriving* led by Renee Jaine at Thrive Lab.

This case study explains the steps we went through, and the early results that are being achieved.



Discover

Late in 2022, our team at AsureQuality ran two *Mental Wellbeing by Design* workshops with lab members in a specific location. The sessions were facilitated by Cushla Beale, Safety and Wellbeing Head, supported by Shona Dodd, Safety and Wellbeing Business Partner, and observed by Renee Jaine from Thrive Lab. Staff found the wide-ranging discussions really powerful, and some even had tears in their eyes as they thanked the facilitators for creating a safe space for sharing.

“That the tool allows every single person to have their voice heard, is absolutely the gold in this work,” *Shona Dodd, Safety and Wellbeing Business Partner.*

Even at this early stage, we learned a few lessons about what works and what doesn't. First off, it was useful to have someone capturing the discussions, as there were many rich insights that weren't directly captured via the diagnostic tool. Second, the sessions were hosted with our frontline people and without people leaders. This created a sense of psychological safety for participants; however, it was a little unsettling for more senior leaders to be aware that conversations had occurred, but to not be brought up to speed with the details, right away. It would have been useful to agree what would be shared, with whom, and when, right from the outset, to help build trust and confidence in the approach.



Define & Develop

We decided not to narrow our focus too quickly. Rather, an external consultant developed an overarching Action Plan that outlined the key focus areas for improving mental wellbeing at work, potential solutions, and timeframes. This was reviewed by our Safety and Wellbeing Head and by other senior leaders, then stress-tested with frontline staff, to see if they agreed with the content in the Action Plan and the proposed short-term actions.

“Quick wins can be important for the team, they help build strong trust and confidence in the process and to build momentum,” *Cushla Beale, Safety and Wellbeing Head.*

Closing the loop with our frontline people was really effective. The team were clearly engaged in the discussion and vocal about what they thought would work – or not.



These are the focus areas and actions we agreed on:

To improve communication and recognition

The intent was to improve the level of interaction between lab leaders and their team, and to give positive recognition, more frequently. Two initiatives were rolled out – a daily stand-up, and an all-hands meeting.

- **Team stand-up.** The lab consists of three smaller teams. The initial plan was for every team to hold a 5-10 minute 'stand up' meeting at the start of each day, featuring:
 - i) stand outs, i.e. work done well the previous day,
 - ii) look outs, e.g. any machinery that isn't working well, or any lessons learned, and
 - iii) shout outs such as birthdays and work anniversaries.

After discussions with team leads, a daily meeting was not deemed feasible, but there was a commitment to meeting at least once a week.

- **Lab-wide meeting.** In addition to team meetings, lab leaders agreed to host regular all-staff meetings, to share updates and to highlight good performance. The initial plan was to host the sessions every fortnight, but lab leaders decided that more frequent meetings would be preferable, so a weekly meeting was established.

Stand-ups and all-team meetings do not represent a major change to work design; however, these kinds of rituals can really help to build belonging and engagement, as we'll see below.

To clarify career pathways

The intent was to ensure our staff have conversations about their career ambitions and potential pathways withinASUREQuality, to stem the turnover of technicians who reach a plateau after 1-2 years in the role.

In response, we committed to hosting quarterly coaching conversations with lab staff. Team leaders flagged that they were not fully aware of the career pathways within the business, so they connected with senior leaders in order to build their capability. In addition, the Organisational Development lead shared a career conversation and planning guide for team leaders to use as the 'backbone' of their coaching conversations.

To improve flexibility around work timing

The intent was to explore different rostering options, to see if more flexible hours were possible, particularly in terms of reducing weekend work. Staff typically work 5 days a week, which includes one weekend day.

The decision to review rosters, within the scope of this Forum project, was made after the team meetings and coaching conversations were already established. An external consultant ran workshops with the lab leaders and frontline staff, to understand the supply and demand dynamics that influence whether the lab is open and why, and to identify any design principles for a revised rostering system. For instance, any new roster should be fair – which is not the same as identical treatment; it should be predictable – so people have certainty about their days off; and it should be win-win, promoting the wellbeing of staff and meeting customer needs.

We identified a range of promising solutions – such as 'All for one and one for all' weekend shifts, in which teams can chip in to help each other with their workload, and finish early if all the tasks are done, without needing to apply for annual leave. Another option was the introduction of Summer hours, permitting staff to start and finish earlier in Summer, to enjoy the sunshine.

The design principles and promising ideas were then fed back to lab leaders, to decide whether and how to pilot a revised rostering system.

Other quick-wins

Finally, a range of other quick-win interventions were actioned by our Health and Safety team. For instance, an Occupational Therapist was brought in to review lab tasks and minimise the risk of discomfort or injury.

↓ Deliver

Although it is early days, the interventions appear to be having a positive impact. The specific AsureQuality lab that engaged in this project saw an 18-point lift in their people experience survey (on a scale that ranges from -100 to +100). Qualitative discussions with staff paint a similar picture.

For instance, the regular small-team and all-lab meetings have led to more interaction between lab leaders and their team. Our people feel that senior leaders are more approachable, and senior leaders are seeing an uptick in engagement and interaction, as 'people bring things to the table'.

Our people also feel an enhanced sense of team, and belonging is a key predictor of employee engagement. As one team member explained about the all-lab meetings,

"It makes you feel like you're part of the company as a whole, because all the different departments are together. People are sharing issues, and there is follow-up from the previous week, what's gone well or improved since."

This project also promoted an increased sense of agency amongst frontline team members, to drive change in areas where they feel it is needed. For instance, team members noted that the positive 'shout out' or recognition wasn't coming up as often as it ideally would, in the team meetings. So they tweaked an existing mechanism, in which employees nominate each other for an award, via secret nominations. The new system has all nominations shared publicly on a wall – in way that makes good work visible, and recognition part of the daily culture. And in the end, all of these little actions add up to a thriving culture. Or as Cushla Beale puts it,

"It can be tempting to search for that eureka moment, or a 'silver bullet' that will dramatically improve people's wellbeing. But lots of little things build culture and mental wellbeing. It's not a big flash, fancy solution. It's communication, it's how we treat people, it's how connected they feel to what they do."



About the Forum

The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum inspires and supports its members to become more effective leaders on health, safety and wellbeing. The Forum has more than 390 members, who are Chief Executives or Managing Directors of significant New Zealand companies.

Contact us info@forum.org.nz or find out more at: www.forum.org.nz

About Thrive Lab

Renee Jaine is the founder and director of Thrive Lab, a boutique consultancy that helps people and teams to thrive at work. Renee offers diagnostic workshops, programmes to drive change, and individual coaching for mid-career professionals.

Renee draws on her experiences as a behaviour-change and management consultant within the worlds of advertising and big-4 consulting, and her training as a coach. She studied behavioural science and happiness at the London School of Economics, a top-ranked social science institution, where she received an MSc (Distinction) and the Charles Mostyn Lloyd Award for Outstanding Achievement. Renee also has experience around the Board table, as the first female Independent Director for New Zealand Certified Builders.

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