

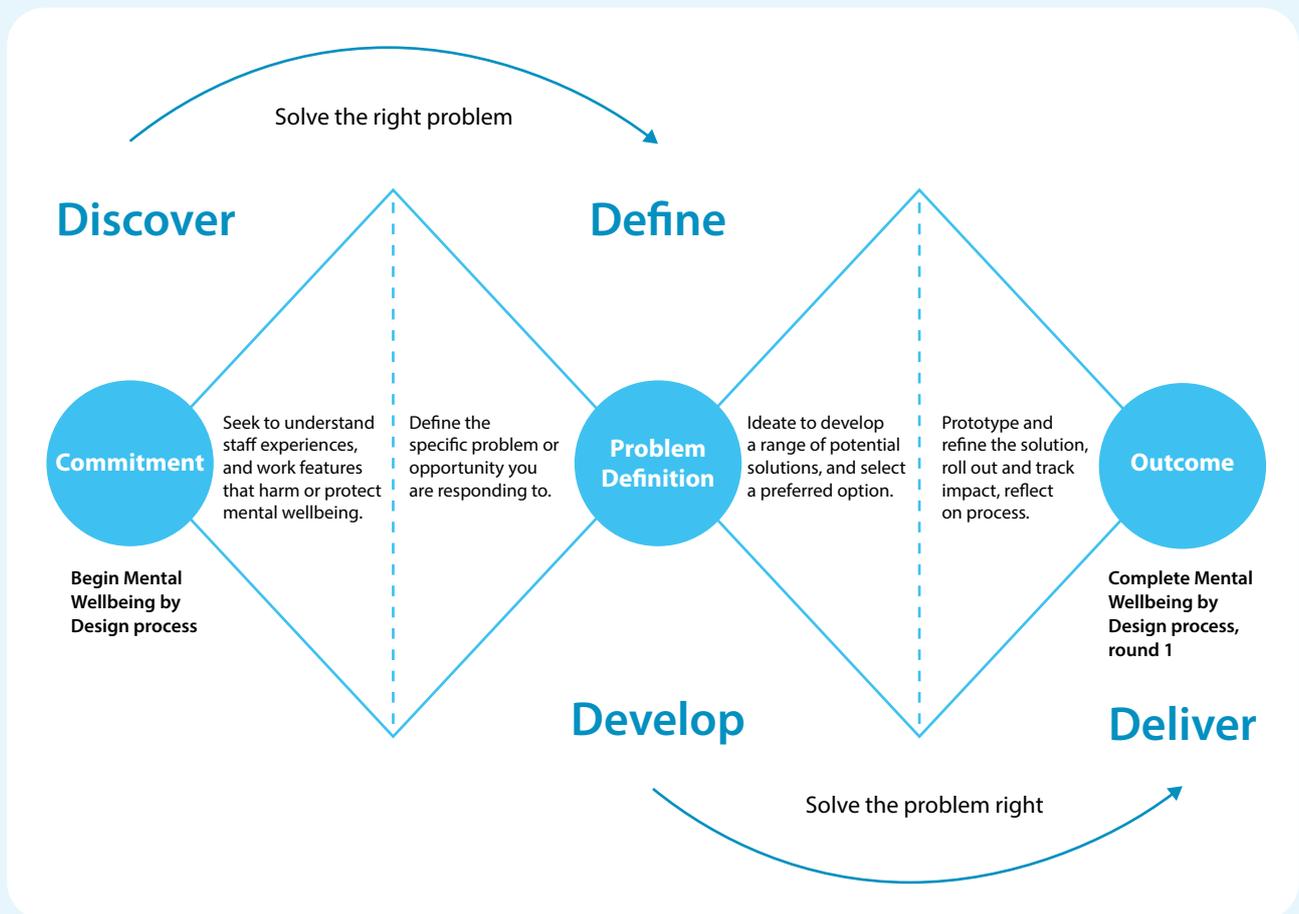
Case study: Presbyterian Support Northern

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



Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) offer a range of social services, including the Lifeline service to support people in distress and at risk of suicide and self-harm.

PSN were one of three 'early adopter' organisations, who sought to redesign an aspect of work in order to improve the mental wellbeing of staff and volunteers. This case study explains the steps that PSN worked through, and the early results that are being achieved.



Discover

Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) were eager supporters of the Mental Wellbeing by Design process. In fact, Janet Bowes, Health and Safety Manager, ran 8 workshops with over 70 attendees, to get a better understanding of the factors that harm or protect mental wellbeing at work. People appreciated the opportunity to be heard – and to have a forum in which to share their experiences.

After team-specific recommendations had been identified and shared, it was time to address more systemic, cross-cutting issues.

Hectic work was a challenge across the organisation – but there wasn't the bandwidth to drive improvements everywhere, all at once. PSN ultimately decided to focus their change efforts on the Lifeline team, and more specifically, the Shift Supervisors who oversee the volunteers and counsellors on the phone line and text channel. The Shift Supervisor team is fairly small (<10 people) and they are all based in Auckland, which made it more feasible to run in-person workshops and change interventions.

A few key lessons were learned at this early stage:

First off, the value of buy-in from senior leaders. The project proceeded at pace, because PSN were the third of three organisations to sign up, and there was a reasonably fixed timeframe in which to do the work. As Janet Bowes reflects, "Because we rushed a little, we had to take back steps to better inform our leadership team. If we did this again, our first step would be earlier consultation with the leadership team about what we want to do and why it really matters".

Second, and on a similar note, there were some minor coordination challenges. If the project were repeated, there would be value in scheduling short, regular catch-ups with the core project team, to keep everyone in the loop and to coordinate activities.

Third – the PSN team did well to set clear expectations and constraints at the beginning of the Discovery process, by noting that there was no ear-marked budget for change initiatives. Lifeline relies on donations to provide services, so they wanted to avoid significant cost increases. As such, low-cost interventions could be feasibly rolled out, but costly interventions would need a very strong business case.

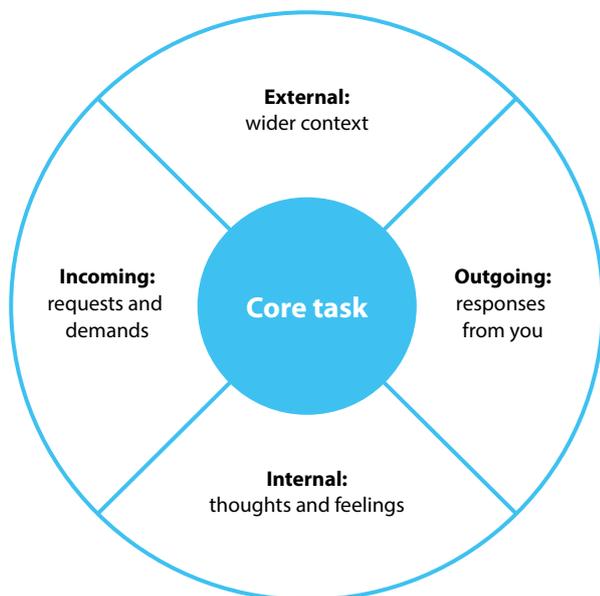


Define

The next step was to get a richer understanding of what 'hectic work' really meant, for the Shift Supervisors. Renee Jaine from Thrive Lab ran a discovery workshop to understand:

- **Dark Spots** – or instances when work feels really hectic, and why
- **Bright Spots** – or instances when work feels less hectic, and why

This was mapped onto a customised framework, to identify the flow of incoming requests and outgoing responses, along with the internal thoughts and feelings that are present when work is hectic, and the external features or wider context, that can exacerbate hectic work.



A few key insights emerged from the subsequent discussion:

First, the Shift Supervisors have a dual role that combines supervision (e.g. listening to calls, triaging high-risk calls, and debriefing with staff or volunteers afterwards), and line management (e.g. coordinating shifts, allocating work, and some behavioural management). Straddling these two roles can be a challenge, particularly as Supervisors are most passionate about supervision.

Second, work feels most hectic when there is a 'perfect storm' of urgent incoming requests, plus challenges from the wider context. For instance, Supervisors may be overseeing multiple high-risk calls from very vulnerable people, calls with the Police, and aggressive callers, while dealing with rostering and shift logistics because teams are short-staffed, and technology challenges such as broken headsets. As one Supervisor put it,

"It's hectic when we have to deal with anything, everything, all at once".

These experiences result in a range of negative emotions – including anxiety, guilt and just pure overwhelm.

"There was a moment in a recent shift where my brain just stopped thinking, for about 15 seconds," Shift Supervisor.

Third, Supervisors find their work less hectic when:

- There's a good staffing mix, which includes:
 - » enough staff on shift
 - » experienced staff, such as SMS leads (who oversee the text machine)
 - » managers around to support, as needed (e.g. to provide debriefs)
- There are fewer competing demands, which allows Supervisors to focus on high-priority issues.

Develop

After the in-depth discovery workshop, a range of How Might We statements were developed and stress-tested with senior management and with Shift Supervisors. The final HMW statement read:

How might we reduce the volume of administrative tasks, for shift supervisors who are 'on shift', so that they can give more attention and focus to client-related high-priority tasks, plus the restorative and educative parts of the role? (Particularly self care, and debriefing).



Shift Supervisors then engaged in an ideation workshop, and identified four strategic ideas and four more tactical ideas, to address hectic work. The ideas centred around:

- Finding ways to split out the core supervisory role and the line management role:
 - » Either on a grand scale (i.e. with the establishment of line managers)
 - » Or in a more tactical way (i.e. splitting out the education and onboarding piece, minimising time pressures related to risk notifications and timesheet completion, etc.)
- Finding ways to leverage more of the skills and talents of the wider team, for instance by:
 - » Identifying 'floating champions' who can offer specific services, such as tech support
 - » Recognising and rewarding people who are team players, and take on tasks when they have capacity to help. (This doesn't directly address the issue of hectic work, but helps to balance the workload, across the team.)

All eight ideas were presented by an external consultant to Helena de Fontenay, Operations Manager at Lifeline, and Daniela Schon, Practice Lead. Together this group fleshed out (i) the detail of how each idea could be rolled out, (ii) estimated costs and (iii) the feasibility of the change. Budget discussions were then held with more senior leaders, and the following changes were agreed:

- Funding was secured for an SMS lead for every shift, rather than just afternoon shifts. Leaders also agreed to separate the induction / onboarding tasks, and in the medium-term, to have a specialist educator take on that role.
- Most tactical changes were agreed to and implemented immediately. This included revising expectations and processes around *when and how* risk notifications and timesheets must be completed. The upshot being – Shift Supervisors have less time pressure for these specific tasks, freeing up capacity to focus on the supervisory role.
- Lifeline agreed to implement monthly staff recognition for those who demonstrate the values in action, and act as a team player and contributor.



One key insight from the Develop stage is the importance of collaborating with internal disciplines that 'own' a particular area. For instance, in this project, a recognition and reward scheme was suggested – and these schemes are typically owned by the People and Culture team. It was important to bring the P&C lead into the planning and implementation discussions – to ensure that this project was aligned with other internal initiatives, and to get buy-in, which increases the likelihood that the reward scheme will continue in the longer term.

Deliver

It's early days, but the initiatives appear to be having a positive effect. SMS leads are being added to all shifts, and Shift Supervisors have commented on their improved experience, when SMS leads are present. The smaller, tactical changes are making it easier for Supervisors to focus on high-priority work, and the recognition scheme (currently in the pipeline) should help to improve team culture and celebrate those who chip in to help.

More generally, this process has helped Lifeline staff to feel heard and valued, and connected into Presbyterian Support Northern, as the following quotes attest:

“I think this whole process has shown staff that we are taking their feedback seriously, we are willing to explore it and find good outcomes. It's also given comfort to the leadership team, that we can look into these topics and find solutions that are feasible and that work,” *Mel Scott, People and Culture Manager.*

“I've heard feedback from the team that they have felt heard and supported. It's solidified the idea that Lifeline is a part of PSN, and we're all in this together,” *Helena de Fontenay, Operations Manager – Lifeline.*

“It's increased trust in PSN and a greater sense of cohesion,” *Tom Dodd, GM Engagement.*

Those are solid results that have been achieved in a relatively short space of time, and within a small budget envelope. And they are results that matter – given that Lifeline are literally helping to save people's lives.

Get support

If you need help right now, you can call:

- **Lifeline helpline** – 0800 543 354 or text 4357
- **Suicide crisis helpline** – 0508 828 865

Support Lifeline

Every day 15 to 20 people at high risk of suicide call Lifeline. A further 300 calls and over 700 texts are sent and received daily through Lifeline's national 24/7 counselling service, which is provided by highly trained staff and volunteers.

Lifeline do not receive government funding, they rely on public donations to provide their free, 24/7 helplines.

If you would like to donate, to enable Lifeline to be there for people in crisis, please visit:

www.lifeline.org.nz/donate

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.

Contact Renee Jaine
hello@thrivelab.org
021 0236 0000

www.thrivelab.org

© 2023 Thrive Lab / The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum. You are free to copy, distribute and adapt this material, as long as you attribute it to Thrive Lab / The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum.