



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

LANCASHIRE CARE FOUNDATION TRUST

AGILE WORKING

What is Agile Working?

The aim of Agile Working is to support the workforce in working in an innovative way. Rather than having a daily obligation to be located at a specific office base, staff are encouraged to work in flexible ways, with the aim of achieving a better service, increasing effectiveness, and delivering objectives whilst at the same time improving the quality of lives for staff.

Agile adjective

1. Characterized by quickness, lightness, and ease of movement; nimble.
2. Mentally quick or alert: *an agile mind*.

[French, *agilis*, derived from Latin *agere*, to drive, do]

For staff who are identified as 'agile workers' this means that they will be equipped with the tools to work anywhere at any time and not be fixed to one particular base. This could include working at any Trust site or partner organisation building, or working from home. In contrast, 'anchor workers' are staff whose role requires them to be fixed at one location and as such will be allocated a desk.

Agile Working puts staff members in much greater control over how, when and where they work, and it supports diversity. It also helps reduce travel time and costs, energy consumption, CO2 emissions and overall waste. Agile Working is truly a winning proposition as it is good for people, good for the environment and good for Lancashire Care's future business.

Lancashire Care's Approach

This case study describes the pragmatic approach taken by Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust to support agile workers, by improving the office surroundings, enabling more effective and flexible working, tackling the problems of paper document storage and reducing the Trust's overall impact on the environment.

With the NHS's need to improve productivity, reduce waste and lower costs, a complete re-appraisal and overhaul of the way the Trust worked made sense on many levels. It highlighted opportunities to reduce the operating costs, reduce printing and paper costs, reduce the Trust's environmental impact, use office space more efficiently and improve the working environment for staff.

BEFORE



The plan was to create fresh, flexible workspaces that were designed around activities, rather than around individuals; a system called "Agile Working". Although not a new idea, it was certainly new to Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust and although implementing it was a bold

decision, it brought about a new freedom and simplicity to the office environment and fully supported staff to work in more innovative ways.

KEY OUTCOMES

The new approach has been to design an office space that is more open and dense, thanks to an increase from 192 to 268 desk positions, whilst also providing a variety of interaction and meeting spaces. Along with the main office being a fresh, open space, each section is now a bright and welcoming place decorated and furnished in a themed colour that reflects the Trust's new corporate branding.

Research consultancy, [YouGov](#), conducted a survey of more than 850 UK directors and managers across a range of industries. Their feedback revealed that valuable time is spent trying to locate paper documents, resulting in staggering financial losses. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK waste an estimated £42.2 million per day simply looking for documents; something that could easily be remedied by creating a 'paperless office' and Lancashire Care is well on its way to fulfilling that objective.

Director of HR and Organisational Development, Joanne Marshall commented:

"Although it's too early to quantify the financial savings we are making on paper, laser cartridges, photocopying and storage, what is immediately obvious is that the whole working environment has improved. It's bright, it's airy and it's clean now that the piles of paper and walls of filing boxes have gone."



AFTER



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

Commenting on the new layout, Senior Human Resources Advisor, Katherine Heyes said: **"The office is fantastic; it's light, streamlined and pleasant to work in. The desk booking system is easy and a great idea and makes planning meetings and work etc. much easier. I'm really enjoying working the flexible way and feel as though our managers and staff are benefiting from this as we are able to be more responsive and proactive."**

The area where the Executive PAs has been re-configured to improve the seating arrangements and to create a hot desking area with an informal meeting area, this is what they have to say about it: **"Although not an agile worker, I can comment on how it affects me as my boss is agile, I book his workspace and find when booking meeting room online as well, I find the clash of bookings stops me from booking both. Otherwise, I can comment from what I see: I note that upstairs annexe office is usually very busy whilst the ground floor annexe is relatively quiet."**

"The low-level seating appeals to me – as long as it can be used as a break away area for relaxation for all staff (break from computer/desk) as well as a seating for catch-ups/discussions."

"As an anchor worker, I have not had much experience of agile working; however I can say that it has been helpful for arranging meetings for my Director. Colleagues who wish to see Patrick do not necessarily have to make the journey to Sceptre Point and he does not have to travel, as OCS can be used with agile workers. In my observations, the hot desk area in the corporate area for agile workers has not been used widely, but this may be due to it only just being completed."

Lean Lead, Frances Bazire says: **"Agile working has been a great opportunity to work differently, more effectively and leaner. It has resulted in a reduction in the amount of travel and as a team we love the new environment at Sceptre Point and the different work environments that you can access."**

"Moving out of an office has been fantastic. There is less room for hidden waste in cupboards and clutter that eventually means big housekeeping events so you can stay on top of it."

"I can see it increasing the focus on managing by results and making sure that the team have the tools to achieve them. Our team information centre has supported us in staying connected with one another even though we're not always in the same place and we've seen a reduction as a result of making better use of our existing technology."



BEFORE



AFTER

BACKGROUND

The average worker in this country spends the equivalent of one day every fortnight simply travelling to and from work. In the course of a year, the simple commute from home to the office produces nearly 20 million tonnes of CO2.

In addition, the increasing number of people working at the Bamber Bridge HQ, Sceptre Point and the sheer volume of documents, files and folders that they were creating, printing, filing and storing was becoming a monumental problem. Staff members were becoming lost behind a veritable Berlin Wall of paperwork and boxes.

What's more, with the NHS need to improve productivity, reduce waste and lower costs, a complete re-appraisal and overhaul of the way the Trust worked would make sense on many different levels. It could highlight opportunities to reduce the operating costs, reduce printing and paper costs, reduce the Trust's environmental impact, use office space more efficiently and improve the working environment for staff.

So how do you not only reduce the environmental impact on the Trust, but also rise to the additional challenges of reducing costs and improving the ability to support a fast-developing business? One thing was certain; the typical response to this type of situation, which is sourcing additional office accommodation, was not going to be an option. The Trust had to look for ways to be more creative, to challenge what resources it had currently available and find ways to make them work better.

Instead of looking for answers outside the organisation, Lancashire Care focused on getting to know and therefore better understand the relationship between its people, its property estate and the new rapidly developing technologies that were now available. What became apparent was the need to develop modern working practices that would allow staff to maximise their performance, support development of the business, drive down cost, and yet at the same time maintain a good work life balance.

The solution? Literally to rip it up and start again...or more accurately, rip it out. Rip out the existing walls, partitions and divisions, and start over with a new approach...a whole new working environment and to do this whilst business continued. The challenge was to create fresh, flexible workspaces that were designed around activities, rather than individuals; a system called Agile Working.



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

PURPOSE

Agile Working is not new, this style of office layout first saw the light of day over 40 years ago, but for Lancashire Care, there is no doubt that it is a brand new way of working. It is about freedom and simplicity and will fully support staff to work in more innovative ways.

Agile Working reflects Lancashire Care's belief that using any workspace should be based on the choice and selection of a working environment that best suits the individual, and not on a simple definition of the location and hours that people should work.

Agile Working allows people to choose between a variety of workplace options, including working not only from Sceptre Point, but from any one of a number of Trust locations, utilising hot-desking. Home working is another practical alternative for some staff members and with the advent of improved telecoms; mobile working is becoming a reality.

RESOURCES

Specialists in this type of work, Ryhurst the Trust's estates partner, is project managing the refurbishment. Appointed in August 2010, Ryhurst play a key role in ensuring that the Trust has the facilities from which to deliver high-quality care services.

To try to give some form of context for the refurbishment costs and projected savings, the total lease and maintenance costs of Sceptre Point are £576,000 per annum.

Prior to the refurbishment project, utilisation equated to £567,000 divided by the existing 192 desks giving a cost of £2958 per person.

After the refurbishment project, utilisation equates to £567,000 divided by 268 hot desk capacity (total desk positions available including both Anchor and Agile positions) giving a cost of £2115 per person.

This equates to a 30% saving per person overhead or £843 saving per person.

With the refurbishment cost c. £200,000 the payback period for this refurbishment is just under 1 year, based on the cost saving overhead per person and the increased utilisation in the building.

BEFORE



AFTER



KEY CHALLENGES

There can be little doubt that technology is improving at a rapid rate; five years ago, who other than Steve Jobs perhaps, could have imagined that something like iPhones or iPads would have even existed, let alone have made such an impact on the way we live and work. New technologies have made and will continue to make it much easier for staff to become more flexible and work at locations that are convenient to them.

Because the intention was that Sceptre House remained open throughout the refurbishment, plans were put in place for teams to relocate. Effective use has been made of facilities and space at Preston Business Centre, Greenbank, Guild Park and the Innovation Centre in Blackburn.

But it's not simply about building, decorating and furnishing; getting the IT infrastructure right was another huge challenge. Moving the floor boxes, relocating the power and data points, but with improved wireless technology, agile staff with laptops can easily move from a hot desk to one of the enclosed spaces, for a small group meeting, or simply to work quietly and without interruption.

There wasn't really any negativity from staff in regards to the changes, apart from a few people being disgruntled about having to move out of the office whilst work was being done. Through regular communication and updates people were kept informed and were pleased with the final outcome.

KEY LEARNING

Director of HR and Organisational Development, Joanne Marshall said:

"The catalyst for this was undoubtedly Transforming Community Services and that philosophy of ambition, action and achievement. This is an approach that is being phased in across the whole organisation; the Executive Management Team has embraced it and fully supports it and we are moving ever closer to having an electronic and paperless office."

Although the majority of the space is open plan, desks will be in clusters with partitions to help maintain privacy. In Area A, where the Directors and PAs currently sit, the new layout will create an additional six desks as well as more compact offices for the Directors.

Area B, will see the creation of five more meeting rooms, bringing the total in this area to seven. In addition, a number of formal and informal meeting spaces have been created right around the building. This includes closed, more formal meeting rooms, with tables chairs, data points and power, together with open "touch down" spaces, for more informal meetings and gatherings around low coffee tables and sofas.



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

To maintain the light, airy feel to the new areas, a clear desk policy has been introduced that will keep desks free from unnecessary clutter. The refurbishment will ultimately see dramatic changes to all areas of Sceptre Point and the response, to date, has been positive

- Most staff appreciate the sense of community that an open work environment can support.
- Open space allows for better communication and exchange of information among colleagues. It is easier to ask each other questions in an open environment.
- Many colleagues prefer being among other people, not wanting to feel "closed in" or "all alone."
- The open work environment allows colleagues to know what's "going on" in the office – being "in the know."

It is clear to see from the feedback so far that the improved working environment is having a positive effect. Communication is improving and the new environment is also supportive of the Trust's values, particularly teamwork, accountability and excellence. It is also enabling staff to put into practice what they have learned on the appreciative leadership course by providing the space for conversations to take place and creating the sense of community that has been referred to.

Equality and Diversity Lead, Clive Taylor was one of the first to embrace Agile Working:

"I've been at Lancashire Care nearly six years now and I was concerned about the prospect of agile working. I'd always been based at Sceptre Point. I had my own desk, cupboards, filing cabinets and I thought however am I going to manage with just a laptop and a couple of drawers? Also as a bit of a technophobe, the prospect of working with just a BlackBerry and a PC was a worry, but I'm the sort of person who simply decides to just get on with things anyway."

Clive had looked into working from home, but his broadband connection was poor and so he hit upon a novel idea: **"I approached Clitheroe Social Services, where I knew we had a mental health team. It's not even a Lancashire Care facility, it's actually Lancashire County Council, but I found out that they have access to the Lancashire Care IT system and they also had a space that they were happy to let me work from."**

It's working out really well for Clive and being the outgoing personality that he is; he has no trouble catching up with colleagues on the occasions he does work from Sceptre Point. In terms of his travel costs, Clive feels it's saving him and the Trust money as he reckons his fuel bills have halved, plus it's improved his work/life balance as the journey from home to Clitheroe social services takes him just six minutes.

Clive concluded: **"The idea of agile working isn't just about using a hot desk at Sceptre Point; it's about finding any LCFT facility that you can work from. For me, my day is far more productive as I'm getting around the Trust, including the quiet little office in Clitheroe and so I get fewer interruptions"**

Agile working has been a really positive experience for me with less travelling, a more productive day, fewer interruptions and happily working on my BlackBerry and laptop...so I'm no longer considering myself a technophobe!"

Whilst taking advantage of the opportunity to work in an agile fashion staff still remember the importance of coming back to base to spend time with their team. For agile working to be a success good structures need to be in place to maintain teamwork and to ensure that colleagues get touch down time together so that interaction and relationships are maintained.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

In transforming Sceptre Point into an agile working environment some key learning points have been identified:

- Good IT support and the right equipment is essential
- Good communication throughout is a must to keep people informed along the way
- Touch down agreements need to be in place
- Clear roles/responsibilities and guidelines for all are required
- Health and Safety and DDA issues must be taken into account from the offset

All of these learning points will help the Trust to identify what it needs to do differently when rolling out the concept of agile working across our 400 other sites.

SUSTAINABILITY

It's not just the construction teams who have been busy clearing out, sorting out the rubbish and filling skips. Staff teams have been implementing lean and 5S processes; Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardise, Sustain... or for the purists who prefer the original Japanese; seiri, seiton, seiso, seiketsu and shitsuke; using 5S methodology puts a focus on effective workplace organisation.

5S is a systematic approach to cleaning up, getting organised and using standards to improve productivity, reduce waste, and improve safety and quality. Clearing out and sorting through what was hanging around the office and securely disposing of what was no longer needed, electronically storing what was still needed and as a result, staff can now maximise the useable space.

NEXT STEPS

Following successful implementation of the scheme at the Trust's headquarters in Preston, the organisation is in the process of identifying a number of additional locations across Lancashire where this approach can be applied.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This case study was written up by a range of people involved in the project, however if you would like more information, the key point of contact is:

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