

KNOWLEDGE

on Tap!

Improvement
thinking for
the Water
sector



A regular drop of value to get
you thinking, specifically for
those amazing people who are
passionate about improvement
in the Water sector

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Author: Jason
Elliott

Innovation without Engagement?



Back in December 2021 we made it along to the 'WWT Water Industry Innovation Conference' to learn all about how innovation is being led across the water sector. There were actual people in a room together.

We'd not heard about the OFWAT innovation fund much prior to this event. If you're not familiar with this, you should take a look. We'd also not heard of SPRING either, an organisation that is set up to support collaboration across the sector. Worth a look if still not familiar: <https://spring-innovation.co.uk/>

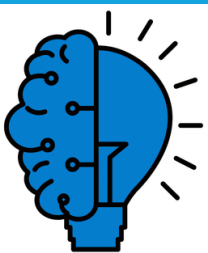


It was a knowledge rich day and got me thinking about a number of key questions. A number of things stuck with me from the keynote speeches and one of them was this from Rob.

"Regulator funds should not replace water companies' efforts in-house" - Rob Light (Chair CCW)

He makes a really strong point here. As the funding mechanisms emerge it can be tempting to focus all 'innovation' efforts outward, into the programmes that emerge with supply chain and forget about the opportunity that exists internally.

If you think about it, everyday there are thousands of brains employed in a water company. If you could harness the power of these thousands of brains with all of their individuality of thinking, around the idea of innovating for the future, then you can make some great strides forward and not just on the innovation front.



**INNOVATION
REQUIRES
ENGAGEMENT**



In order to do this though you need **ENGAGEMENT**. This got us mulling over how engagement and innovation are linked.

We don't think this is too much of a stretch, but it made us look for conversations around engagement for the rest of the day. Engagement of Customers, Suppliers and Employees. We found some conversations around Customer, a lot around Supplier but not so many around Employee.

So, reflecting on what was a great conference we'd really like to champion the idea that there is a huge opportunity for water to learn ways to continuously drive its internal engagement agenda in support of Innovation.

How are you planning to harness the power of your thousands of brains towards your innovation challenges in 2022?



Do ambitious goals require new thinking?

In January we attended the WWT Waste Water conference, virtually. There were some great insights shared and a number of questions running through our minds following all of the presentations and discussions. This one statement, right at the outset, really stuck with us though. Here's how it was framed:

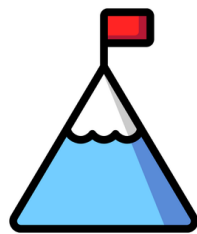
"The number of Pollution incidents has plateaued since 2014"

As the conference went on we heard a lot about ambitious goals, what had been achieved, certain projects but still couldn't get this statement out of our heads. Are we just setting ambitious goals now? We don't think so. Ambitious goals have been a staple of the sector year on year, amp on amp from what we can see so how have we gone 8 years with no further progress around this?

A question that came to mind....How has the thinking changed / evolved in the past decade?

We're firm believers that if you want something different then you need to start introducing different thinking into the equation, especially at a leadership level. Setting the goals is one thing but understanding how we are going to be able to get there is another thing entirely, and it's not going to be what we did in the past decade.

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**AMBITIOUS GOALS
REQUIRE
NEW THINKING**



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Towards the end of the conference there was a presentation by Simon Cyhanko at Northumbrian Water which was all around how they had gone about working with people in the community to enact change in Customer behaviours. They have built a team with a defined purpose around building relationships in key regional areas to support behaviour change.

Now we don't know the full details but this felt like an emergent way of working as a result of some different thinking. It may or may not have had a huge impact on the number that has apparently plateaued but for us this demonstrated a less mechanical approach to thinking about the problem, a more human approach which was based on building relationships and developing trust. A great example.

When you think about the current strategies, plans, activities that are aimed at achieving your ambitious goals, how confident are you that the thinking these are built on is significantly different than 8 years ago?

Are we connecting enough beyond boundaries?



It was whilst connecting up with one Water Leader back in March that we gained some additional insight into our inter-connected (or not) things are and it really got us thinking about where the real opportunities lie for Water in the years ahead.

During a stormy period that led to some big challenges for Water companies, one of the biggest challenges, it seems, is the scenario of power outages leading to failures in treatment works, pumping stations and other assets. We all know that when these assets fail there can be major impacts such as pollutions in rivers and 'no water' to areas. Water companies are measured against their ability to avoid such scenarios and so what should we do?

“Is it the responsibility of the electricity provider OR the water provider OR both to deal with this situation?”

If we take a trip into the Electricity provider for a moment who have had the outage. As I understand it the typical measures are around outage times across customers BUT does this provide the means for necessary collaboration to drive a different solution between the 2 providers in relation to a bigger, interconnected problem?

A pollution impact as a result of a power outage may be felt by the water provider but not by the electricity provider.



**CONNECTION
BEYOND PERCEIVED
BOUNDARIES**



Thinking wider and considering how interconnected things are with a view to exploring and leveraging them can have greater benefits for everyone involved.

The only boundaries that exist are the ones we have put there ourselves and quite often the hinder not help.

And so, considering how we currently measure performance, that we aren't the only provider in a given region and the principle that there are no boundaries only those that we perceive to be there...

Is there an opportunity to define better measures to support a more collaborative approach to solving these types of challenges?

If the answer is yes, we need the regulators to open their thinking too, in support of fostering more collaboration, not hindering it.



Have you forgotten about your People?

As we started to come back from the Covid situation, in March we found ourselves back in various rooms with lots of people. The sudden increase in actual meet ups with people caused a bit of reflection from the last water leadership voices we heard talking about just that, 'people'.

**“One thing I think we often forget is engagement with our people”
- Dave Hinton (South East Water)**

This was a comment we resonated with when we heard Dave talk at the start of the year. We see lots of strategies, programmes and projects, not just in water, that focus heavily on processes and systems improvements, but give little or no thought to the biggest opportunity within any business, the people.

Improving the work is always going to be critical, but how you go about doing this is even more so, in our opinion. The best way to help improve the work is by engaging people, helping them connect, generate new thinking and build new skills. It's easy to say we are going to be more people centric, but it is what we do and not just what we say that translates. To 'not forget engagement with our people' requires a certain type of leadership that supports the idea of connection. We heard Warren talking at length around this just after Dave.

**“The emotional connection became more important”
- Warren Buckley (Thames Water)**

This is the idea that covid has intensified the need for leadership to put more into supporting people and building connection. For us this comes down to one starting point and that's the idea of building more trust by leading with more high trust behaviours. This requires constant self-analysis and the desire to improve as a leader.

This thinking draws us back to the sectors desire to improve trust with customers (currently measured at 68% of people)...



CUSTOMER TRUST

REQUIRES

COLLEAGUE TRUST



...and the belief that to increase trust outwardly, with your service users you must have developed high trust environments internally for those that provide the experience for your Customers, otherwise all bets are off.

What behaviours are you currently engaged in, that foster greater levels of emotional connection with your people?

Are we helping our people to deal with difficult conversations?



Having travelled around a fair bit in the first half of 2022, having plenty of conversations with groups around the topic of 'conflict' we started thinking about how this plays out for many people working within water companies.

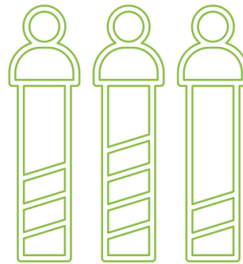
Our thinking was immediately drawn to the idea that water companies operate a 'break-fix' system, that's to say that something breaks and then we fix it. This hasn't changed for many a year but in current climate we do wonder if systems like this now have a higher level of 'difficult conversations' attached to them.

If you think about front line staff, whether that's in the call centres or out in the community, they are now having conversations with people who have not only had a pandemic to deal with but are now living through a cost of living crisis. Some people will be struggling to pay their bills, some people will have issues on their own properties that they just can't afford to get fixed and some developers will be even more stretched in their cashflows.

INCREASE IN DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



**CALLS FOR
A SKILLS UPGRADE**



The current situation points to a raised set of emotions on the customer side and therefore the potential for greater levels of difficult conversations. Our People may need to learn how best to help.

As the world changes and the dynamic of these kinds of interactions shifts, it's important to ensure that people are supported in being able to cope with the change in demand. Just counting the number of contacts, the time it takes to deal with them and how many are closed does not take account of the skills required from people to be able to not only move towards a desired outcome that everyone can gain closure from but to build their own resilience, to maintain their own health, whilst delivering in difficult circumstances.

So for any Water leaders who are currently leading teams that face off to Customers we would urge you to think about...

How best you can support your people so they are equipped to deal with a shift in the demand they are facing?

How effective are your people effective in dealing with conflict in a way that is consistent with your company values?

If you want to achieve your CMEx/DMEx goals, paying attention to the HOW and not just the WHAT



Is there ever not a Transformation programme going on?

We started thinking about this question on the back of kicking off a couple of 'Green Belt' cohorts in April and May. Everyone brings along something they are going to be working on and there's always a big question around how these opportunities link back to strategy. The words 'Transformation programme' crops up again and again, there's always something going on.

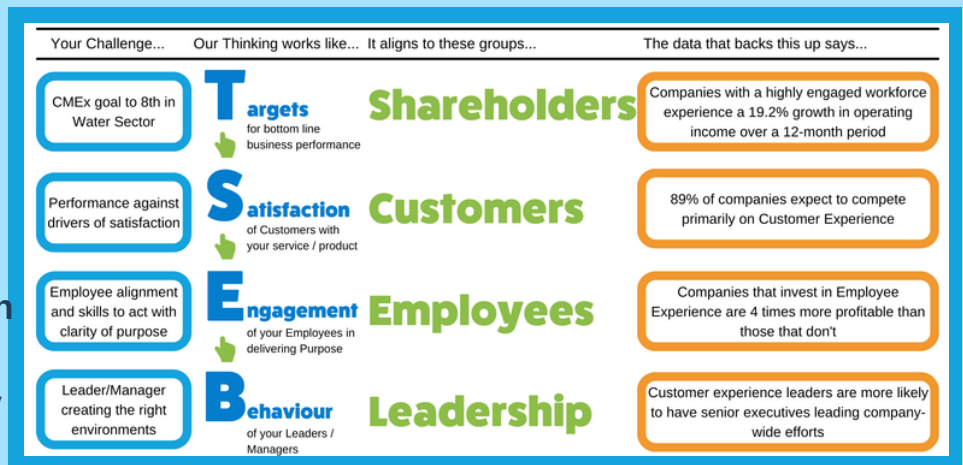
These programmes are triggered in a number of ways such as new CEO, Amp period, Ofwat performance indicator, not having one already BUT are they always transformational AND should there ever be a period where you don't have one of these running?

So, are they always transformational? We think this depends on your definition.

We used to think changing systems and processes was quite transformational but then we started to think a bit broader about all of the other things involved in bringing about the delivery of a vision and a purpose for a business. When you think about it broader there are a lot more interconnecting things and the most complex and definitely most impactful of these (in our opinion) is the People and the relationships.

Lots of programmes are very focussed on the technical, mechanical things that go on and these are important BUT they pay little regard to the fabric that weaves all of this together in the interactions of people, how they think, how they behave and how they align towards achieving whatever it is they are there for. If you're leading and expecting your transformation programme to deliver the goods you may want to have a think closer to home as you may not be going about things in the BEST way. Take a look at this....

We started using this model a while back to frame a conversation about where you may want to start (the B) when thinking about business performance, namely on the leadership behaviour and creation of an environment for the people in order to leverage the capability to transform from this base.



We're not sure there always needs to be a transformation programme running but almost certain that there should be a consistent effort to drive from the B to the T as this in itself may prove quite transformational for the business that the behaviour change takes place within.

Are you putting your eggs into a technology and process shaped basket without really considering what YOU can do to transform things through YOUR own behaviours?

Additional resources to support YOU with these conversations



As well as creating these 6 conversations, we provided a host of resources to support you in developing your thinking further. There's a host of media here, it's all free. We hope you enjoy



A series of Video's aimed at helping leaders, especially those within the water sector, to focus thinking on some of the internal improvement challenges.

There are 5 main video's with an intro and recap too.

Here's the link:

<https://youtu.be/pa11BFPUuTA>

In Q4 of 2021 we pushed out 2 reports which were based around future skills for Water Leaders and Managers. We surveyed a number of leader and managers across the sector with the aim on generating insights. We named the series 'Leaders on Tap'. If you haven't already seen the reports you can grab the PDF's here:

<https://getknowledge.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Leaders-on-Tap.pdf>

<https://getknowledge.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Contrasting-the-voice-of-our-Middle-Management-Leaders-on-Tap.pdf>



We believe there is a BEST way to deliver change and here it is. Lee and Jason talk through the Get Knowledge BEST model with the aim of helping leaders think differently about how they are currently working to deliver their Business Goals

Here's the link:

https://youtu.be/IEird_6alJQ





Water specific ways in which we provide support

We support businesses in a number of ways but here are 2 'Water specific' services we have been providing into Water companies in support of Water leaders driving business performance

Improvement Training for Water



"Drive innovation in Water through the **PEOPLE** engaging with it, everyday"

We've taken traditional improvement training, overlaid our own values and experiences of what adds value and flowed in our Water experience.



"Unleash the power of your **PEOPLE** to improve, everyday"

We've taken traditional operational excellence approaches and brought a laser focus on habits and behaviours whilst dripping in our water experience. We have had great success within Water companies with this LEADER led approach to driving performance improvement through PEOPLE.

We offer a no strings attached 'Get Knowledge' activity to help understand any opportunity so drop us a message today to learn more and get started at

info@getknowledge.co.uk

About Get Knowledge & the Author



GET KNOWLEDGE

Get Knowledge is a coaching, training and consultancy business based in the North of England.

Working within the Service sector, primarily within Water, Customer Operations, Shared Service & Change functions we learn together and create Fun, Authentic, Caring & Trusted teams that deliver more with less.

People see a lot of change, BUT not a lot of improvement. That is where we are different, the foundation for all improvement starts with learning and the reason we are called 'Get Knowledge'.

Socrates said, "I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think!", and we know it is time to think differently about HOW we all approach change.

Our Values of FACT (Fun, Authentic, Caring & Trust) are not just how we are, they fundamentally underpin our standards of service.

You can find out more about Get Knowledge by going to www.getknowledge.co.uk OR you can drop us a message at info@getknowledge.co.uk



“Jason is a fantastic coach, he’s super adaptable and can work successfully with a really wide range of people. He’s worked with our leadership teams to embed a Performance Excellence culture, to understand how to identify problems and solve them, how to lead through coaching and most importantly how to develop a sense of team purpose that everyone can buy into”

– Zoe Burns-Shore (CCO Yorkshire Water)

The Author - Jason Elliott

Jason is a father, mountaineer, ladies football coach and co-founder of Get Knowledge. Jason helps business leaders and managers with all things improvement, with a slant towards organisations with a key role to play in our future world.

After 18 years working using a variety of improvement methods and leading a bunch of improvement and operational teams, Jason decided to stop 'consulting' and now looks to focus on helping people to think differently about solving their own challenges by taking a more coaching led approach.

This led to the emergence of our Sustainable Performance Excellence practice.

Over the past 4+ years and into current day, Jason has been hands on with water leaders helping to solve a variety of challenges.