

Virtual Workshop Series: Exploring the improvement skills that are needed in recovery

Workshop 1 Report

In this write up of the virtual workshop that took place on 13 July 2021, we will include a summary of the content that was shared, as well as synthesis of comments from group discussions and live chat.

The event was the first in a series of 6 workshops that Q Lab Cymru will deliver over coming months. Q Lab Cymru's aim for the series is to support improvers in Wales, along with Q community members, and the wider improvement community, with skills, attitudes and behaviours for collaborative change.

Each workshop is designed to give time and space for improvers to reflect and share what has taken place throughout the pandemic, and hear case examples about improvement practice that works well.

The focus of this inaugural workshop was to:

- Explore the skills and attitudes needed for collaborative change with practical guidance that will help you during recovery
- Provide a platform for you to reflect on your practice, and share and discuss your key learnings and experiences with others
- Shape the content for upcoming workshops

1. About Q Lab Cymru

A number at the workshop expressed an interest in finding out more about Q Lab Cymru, and so we will begin this report by taking a quick look of at Q Lab Cymru.

Q Lab Cymru is an initiative to improve health and care for people in Wales. It is a partnership between Improvement Cymru and Q, a connected community of improvers across the UK and Ireland. Q Lab Cymru receives funding from the Health Foundation, an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK.

Through the Lab we aim to bring together topic specialists, improvement experts and service users from across the system to explore, develop, test and implement ideas to make progress on the complex challenges facing health and care services in Wales. The Lab provides a space for people and organisations to learn, reflect, experiment and adjust programmes of work to make them as effective as possible. Developing skills for working creatively and collaboratively are central to the Q Lab Cymru approach and we recognise the importance of building and developing the skills in this.

More about who we are can be found on our [website](#)

2. Setting the context for the series

Dominique Bird, Head of Capacity and Capability, Improvement Cymru, began our workshop by describing the narrative arc that runs across the series. This focuses on understanding what was different about improvement during the pandemic and exploring the improvement skills that are needed in recovery based on what has been learnt.

Dominique explained that while we will focus on discovering what this means for individual, personal skills development, we will also pay attention to what this means for our teams, organisations, and the wider improvement community.

We heard from Dr John Boulton, National Director of NHS Quality Improvement and Patient Safety, on his personal reflection of where we are now and the direction of travel towards recovery, and a recording of what he said will be available on our [website](#)

John highlighted the way in which we not only learned what the challenges were during the pandemic, but how improvement could be used at pace, and how the science of improvement was applied in its tools, methods and approaches.

He observed that as the days of 2-3 year long improvement programmes are now gone, we need to consider: what that means in the way we think about improvement; how we go about enabling others; and what skills we will use in recovery.

In concluding, John said how much he was looking forward to exploring answers to these questions with everyone over the coming series.

3. Who was at the workshop

Around 60 improvers from across the health and social care sector in Wales joined the workshop.

Through asking questions early on in the workshop we were able to acknowledge what we are feeling and sensing, and share our motivations for attending.

What brings you here today?

Many of us joined to benefit from learning and sharing experiences and ideas with others, for networking and to understand more about the work of Q Lab Cymru.

How are you feeling today?

Our wellbeing check-in reiterated what we are hearing a lot across health and care: people have worked incredibly hard throughout the pandemic, and people are now tired. But as we see in the word cloud, there is also optimism and curiosity about how we use this as a watershed moment to make things better, and how we can experiment with new ways of working to build on what we learnt during the pandemic.



4. Recent research and insights

We want to place published research at the centre of the series and as a context from which to explore the skills needed in recovery. Finding out from our partners involved in recent research set the scene by giving us an insight into the role of improvement during the response to pandemic.

Joining us at the workshop was Dr Mark Griffiths, who shared the themes emerging from the [NHS Wales COVID-19 Innovation and Transformation Study Report undertaken by the Welsh NHS Confederation](#), and Henry Cann, from the Health Foundation who highlighted the insights from [Role of improvement during COVID-19. Learning from the Q Community](#)

5. Discussion groups

One of the aims of the workshop was to provide a platform for us to reflect on our practice, and share and discuss our key learnings and experiences with others.

Using time in small group discussions we reflected on: what skills came to the fore in the pandemic, and if any of these were new, and what skills were used less and why.

Main themes emerging from the conversations

Weaving themes from the notes made by breakout room hosts produced the following highlights:

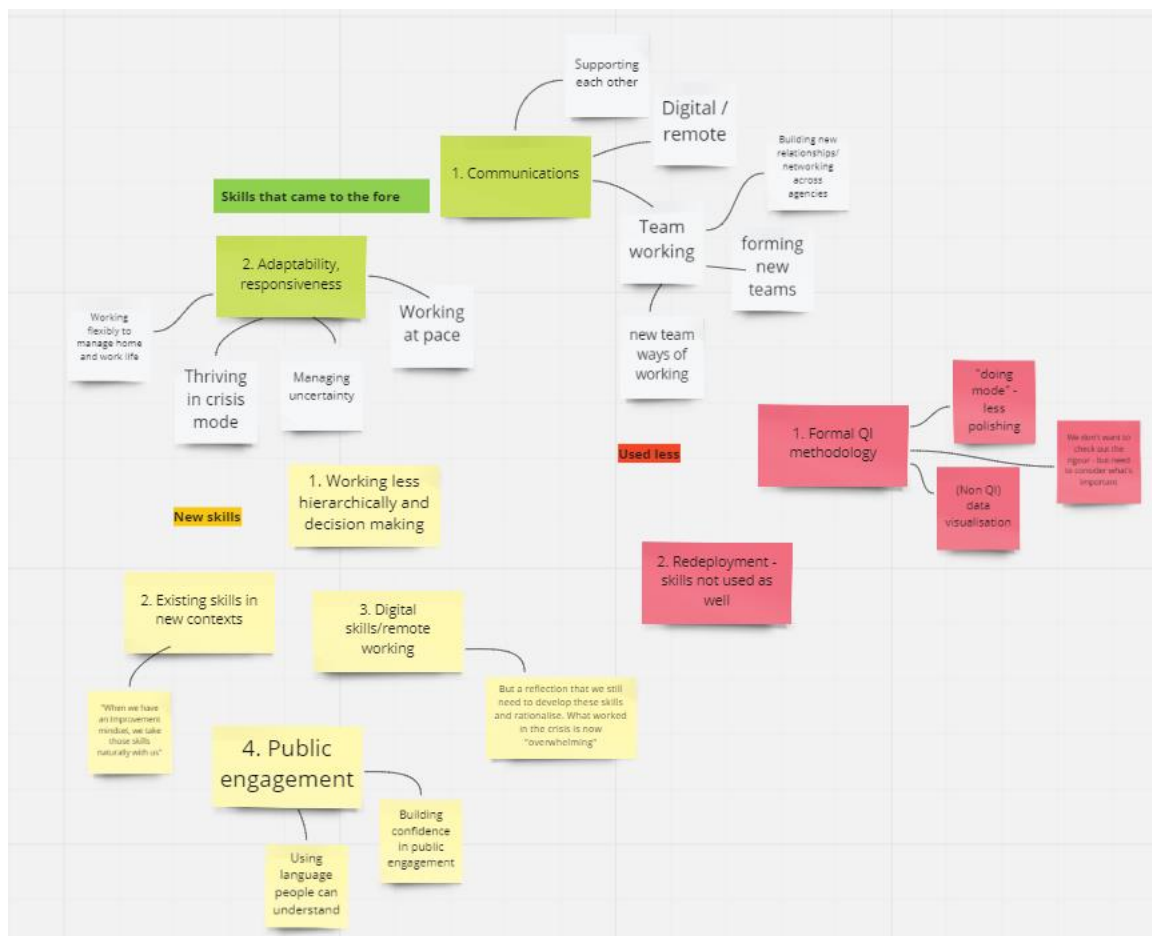
Communications, adaptability and responsiveness really came to the fore. We reflected on how important this was for team working: when forming new teams quickly due to redeployment, working at pace, supporting each other, and getting used to new ways of working remotely.

We reflected on the new skills we developed in terms of engaging with the public, developing new digital skills, and decision making as we were working in a less hierarchical

way. However we also reflected – drawing on a reflection from Henry’s presentation – on the importance of “improvement muscle memory”: our improvement skills were used in a different context, and helped us to draw on our existing skills in a new way, and “improvement was in every day thinking”.

Building on this point when reflecting on what skills we used less: for some, our skills were not used best in redeployed roles. Some reflected that we used less of the formal improvement tools and approaches: people were in reactive, “doing mode”.

This didn’t allow for systematic planning, and we had to present data in different ways or make use of imperfect data. There is a lot to learn from this: as we reflected, we don’t want to “chuck out the rigour”, but use this to “improve improvement” to focus on what’s most important.



6. Explore the skills and attitudes needed for collaborative change

One of the themes arising from the published research and discussion groups is the real appetite to continue with the new-found collaborations that emerged in the pandemic. Using a brief overview of the [Skills for collaborative change framework](#), Des Brown, Q Lab Cymru Lead, explained how this framework, developed by Q Health Foundation and Nesta, can be used to support everyone in making this new way of working a continued reality. The workshop series is being designed to explore the key skills within the framework to: Bring people together; Learn by doing; and Initiate change, by building opportunities for us to hear case examples of improvement work that have drawn heavily on these skills, along with the time and space to think through the importance of these skills and apply them in our work. The section concluded with a polling opportunity to indicate skills that are of most interest and relevance, and we will be taking these choices into the design decisions of our forthcoming workshops.

7. Informing the design of future workshop sessions

Another aim of the workshop was setting time aside for capturing your thoughts and using this to shape the content for upcoming workshops.

The ethos of collaboration and co-creation runs deep in Q Lab Cymru's approach and, by taking the time to pay attention to what is important to you, means we can design subsequent workshops that have relevancy and practical application.

By entering a braver space and making your feedback instantly visible with the live results being shown shows our commitment to learning together. Using an after action review provided space for reflection on the learning that had taken place.

Here is a summary of what you shared:

Actions I'm going to take...

Share learning with others, take more time for reflection and connecting with others. We also gathered feedback to inform future sessions.

What went well in this workshop?

Safe space; benefit in taking time for individual and shared reflection; connecting and learning with others; hearing from a diverse range of people with common and different experiences; being challenged to reflect on new questions.

What would make it even better?

More time in break out groups and sharing; real case examples; more chance to explore skills in depth.

From this feedback we see that what is important to you has the same importance for us at Q Lab Cymru, and from your suggestions we have been expanding the design of the workshop to include the elements we all hold valuable.

Join us for our next workshop where you will see real-life case examples of bringing others together that include those with lived experiences; extended amount of time in small groups in structured discussion on the skills needed for bringing people together; and dedicated time and space for self-reflection to directly relate and apply practicable ideas gained in the workshop to your own practice.

We look forward to you joining us again on Tuesday 3 August at 11:30 to 13:00, register [HERE](#)