Strathclyde stands up to continuous improvement

A case study by Susan Ali
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The University of Strathclyde was the first university in the UK to widely adopt the Daily Stand Up (DSU) approach. In 2013, our Business Improvement Team was created (now known as Continuous Improvement Directorate) and the team was the first to trial this approach. Adopting these meetings started as a desire to improve communication, create a culture of continuous improvement across the university, and empower staff to solve problems at their own level.

These meetings have been held every day since May 2013 and are still taking place, even with the current lockdown situation where the entire team is working from home. Held every day for 10-15 minutes, the main concept of a DSU is that the meeting belongs to the team, the entire team has an equal voice and every team member takes a turn at leading the meetings.

The introduction of DSU to a team or department at Strathclyde initially began as a top-down approach. Senior Management identified areas they thought would benefit from having a daily team meeting. Over the years, this approach has evolved and now teams who want to improve communication and productivity, empower their staff, start solving issues and share knowledge, contact our team asking for help. Team leaders who have seen how DSUs work in other areas, or have heard about them from colleagues, request help to set up a meeting for themselves. Our team has now implemented over 60 DSUs at the University of Strathclyde, and we have even set them up at another university.

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There is often resistance from some team members when we introduce the concept of a DSU. The thought of having a meeting every day for 10-15 minutes can be too much for some people to take in at the start, especially if the team already has longer weekly or monthly team meetings. Others do not like being told that they now have to start attending daily meetings on top of all the other meetings they have to attend. From our experience, those who initially resist DSUs, actually see the benefit of having them after only a short period of putting them into practice. Having run DSUs for so long now, we are able to discuss the benefits with teams and share our own experiences. Some of these include being able to consistently keep the meeting to time, reducing time at other meetings, and knowing that we can make positive changes and improvements. An agenda is essential – those who deviate from the agenda end up having an unproductive meeting. Meetings then end up lasting a lot longer than the allocated 10-15 minutes.

We survey team members before the meetings are introduced and then again after the team’s meetings have been up and running for around 6-8 weeks. This has demonstrated to us that from all the teams that have been surveyed, 86% agree that their communication has improved, 63% agree that teamwork and collaboration as increased and 60% of team members feel more confident about raising ideas. Over half of those surveyed agree that they feel more empowered in their role as a result of the DSUs. Benefits that can be attributed to a DSU are a reduction in time spent in other meetings and in the number of phone calls and emails received. The meetings provide a dedicated time to speak to each other and give each team member an equal voice. Team working is enhanced through knowledge sharing and effective communication. Problem-solving capability is strengthened and continuous improvement activities are able to be incorporated into every day. Importantly, it aligns the work of the team to support the delivery of the University’s strategic priorities.

“The Comm Cell [daily stand up] has positively transformed how we work as a team. Coming together daily (in person or remotely) helps us deliver our collective vision and meet our targets effectively. The cell has stimulated great ideas and made us more efficient”.

– Roddy Yarr, Assistant Director Estates, Sustainability
When implementing DSUs at the University of Strathclyde and through our experience, we have picked up the following tips:

• **Lead by example** – demonstrating how these meetings are used in our own team goes a long way to help with the implementation with another team. We can talk about how we use them to ensure our team solves issues, comes up with ways to make improvements, and to keep each other informed on what we are working on. We often invite people to our meetings so they can see how they operate.

• **Discuss reasons and requirements with the team beforehand** – this is essential before going ahead with implementing a DSU. The meetings are a tool that can help teams improve communication and enhance their problem-solving abilities. Starting meetings at a time when the team is going through a restructure is not the best time to start. It is better to do this once the changes are in place.

• **Continuous improvement training session** – our team holds a training session that discusses the theory of DSUs and describes how the meetings should structured and run. Often team members may never have used this style of meeting before, so it is useful for them to have an idea of how they work before implementing them.

• **Support for a period of time** – as these are very structured and different from what teams are used to, supporting the meetings for a short period of time can help embed them. It allows the team to ask questions and see the meeting in action. Techniques of keeping the discussions on track can often be in contrast to how things have worked in the team previously.

• **The team’s meeting** – traditional team meetings tend to be led by the manager. DSUs are different as every team member takes a turn to lead the meeting. It is important to emphasise this during the training session to help the team understand that they all have an equal voice and the meeting belongs to the entire team.

• **Regularly seek to improve your daily stand-ups** – They should evolve over time as teams try out new ideas.