Focus Podcast Episode #1
Enhancing Staff & Customer Experience at the Bodleian

Transcript

Roberta: Welcome to the first Podcast in a series that the Focus team is recording to help everyone across the University learn about the benefits of Focus tools. The Focus team works on a range of activities, projects and pieces of consultancy within the University to support our Professional Services Strategy and empower staff to shape better ways of working. We partner with faculties and departments to collaborate and enable improvement activities using Focus tools and methodologies so that colleagues can sustain their journeys of improvement, supported by the University's growing continuous improvement community. I'm Roberta Burtsal and I've been a Continuous Improvement Practitioner in the Focus team since early 2019. I'm joined today by Athena Demetrious, the Bodleian Libraries' Admissions Officer. I worked with Athena and her team back at the start of my Focus journey, to see how we could help the Admissions team who were increasingly frustrated by trying to provide excellent service to visitors in a less than ideal office space. Athena, can you explain more?

Athena: Hello Roberta, thank you very much for having me and I wish you all the best with this idea – I think it's a brilliant idea. I think we met back in 2019, and the idea was to revise and review all our processes together, with your help, so that we could continue providing an excellent customer service bearing in mind all the restrictions that we had in the office. So, we established a really good rapport from the beginning, and to this day I'm very happy to see that we have kept this relationship. At first we had a meeting to establish what we do in Admissions – our role – to get an idea and a feel of our team and of our customers. And then we started introducing different tools – a variety of tools – that helped us to see our processes in another light and also to pinpoint our problems and perhaps find solutions. Sometimes you know your problems, but you don't think about possible solutions. So it was very good, especially the *Impact-Effort Matrix*, that was a very good tool. Also the *Kipling Questions*, as well. It was a very fruitful collaboration that we had, and it did help us at the time and also it helps us afterwards – when all things changed!

Roberta: [Laughs]. Yes, Indeed! That's good to hear. It's probably worth mentioning that your office space, when you were office based, was fully accessible to the public so you had no private areas for quiet working or team noticeboards. And the fact that your team work on a rota basis. So from a Focus point of view it was quite difficult to get everyone together to discuss the issues, but we came up with a plan for that.

Athena: Quite right. It was a very big challenge and we worked on it together, and we discovered ways for the team to find out everything about the different tools and how to use them in the office bearing in mind that we are the only open office for the Bodleian and we lack private space. So it was: hiding things inside our cupboards – it was a very interesting time! But it worked. Because everyone was very willing to make it happen.

Roberta: Yes indeed, that was a first for us – inside cupboard doors! But because Focus has got some very easy tools to use, such as the *Kipling Questions* that you mentioned Athena, it was quite easy to introduce them to the team so that they could in their own time, when convenient, explain their concerns. But as ever, there are always far more ideas of things to improve or processes to address than there is time to deal with them. And that's when one of the favourite tools that you mentioned, Athena, comes in: the *Impact-Effort Matrix*. This helps you look at the

effort involved to make a changes but also, importantly, looks at the impact the improvement will have on your customers. And it really helps with working out what to work on first.

Athena: Very much so, It's always more easy to see the problems but it's very difficult to actually sit down and think of a possible solution, bearing in mind the constraints. So it was very constructive for the team to be able to say: this is the problem; let's see the possible solutions and how easy it is to implement them. Because for one problem you may have different solutions. But one may be easier to implement than another. So it was a very interesting tool, and very useful to have, and to this day actually we do use it for a variety of issues that arise in the office.

Roberta: That's really good to hear! Another of the tools that we used – again these are very simple tools – was *Go See*. Because you can learn so much from observation. And because of the team's constant focus on customer service, it was useful to actually talk to some of the visitors. You may recall, Athena, that I came to the office one afternoon, and after you had finished helping each visitor you asked them if they would be willing to answer a few more questions.

Athena: Yes I remember, it was actually a very good idea because it's always good to know the customers' voice. And it's better for someone else who's not a part of the team to ask. So I was very pleased that the majority of our applicants [customers] were very willing to sit with you and answer your question and it was very good feedback for us as well. Not only to reaffirm what we do well but also possible ways of improving in certain areas. So thank you, it was a very good idea.

Roberta: Yes absolutely, it's really important to get this first-hand feedback because when you were more office based, some of the queries and transactions with individuals – I was slightly worried that the process was taking too long. But when I talked to the visitors, they all said – without fail – how efficient the process was for them. And how they appreciated the attention to detail, and support, that your team provided.

Athena: It was very reassuring to find out through this tool that we were doing thing correctly.

Roberta: Are there other situations now, in your day to day work – and obviously with the impact that the pandemic has had – where you have found that using Focus tools has been helpful?

Athena: Very much so, especially when we had to move our work remotely so we were no longer office based for quite a bit of time, and our mandate changed because we could no longer issue Bodleian read cards so it was helping readers by email. But also it was the time for us to look in more depth at all our different processes and change the way we would be welcoming readers to our office when we eventually returned, because at the moment we were working on an appointment basis. So again, Focus and the tools helped us to figure out a way to take care of this and set it up in the right way… how to communicate it to our readers… And so the Focus tools we used while we were working on site we use them to help us work remotely in the most efficient way. And to help us as well – it was a very stressful time for everyone of course, but having certain tools and certain structure, it was very very helpful for us as a team. And we also did a very lovely project - my team-mates did a project using Focus tools and how to transfer them from an on-site environment to a remote environment. So we did definitely use Focus tools during that period – and we are still using them to this day. And hopefully we will continue using them while we are in Admissions.

Roberta: That's brilliant. That's really nice to hear. Thank you Athena, and thank you very much for your time today. And hopefully other people will be inspired by your experience of using the tools.

Athena: Thank you very much Roberta. Thank you for having me and I hope someone finds this very very useful as well.