This brochure introduces ‘Sustainable Work Systems’
What is it? Sustainable Work Systems (SWS) is the union’s way of building more effective workplaces. It focuses on involving union members, delegates and management in a collaborative process that looks at how to improve work systems in your workplace. It aims to build a culture in your workplace where staff and management work together to transform your workplace.

What does it look like? Let’s first look at what it is not. In a traditional workplace most change is driven by management. They decide what the problem or issue is. They decide what the options are to fix it. They might consult with you and you might get to change some stuff around the edges. Then you have to implement these ideas.

These changes inevitably result in you having to do more work with fewer people and the same poor systems. These changes are often made by managers who have only a limited understanding about what you do and the pressures you face every day at work.

In a SWS workplace, change is discussed and agreed collaboratively between the union members, delegates and managers. You jointly agree the problem. You jointly agree some possible solutions and you are able to implement these; monitoring results to ensure you achieve what you set out to improve.

Workplaces are transformed into places where the experience of the workers who actually do the job is valued and used to improve the work for everyone, and deliver what the customer/ client/patient really wants.
How does it work? SWS can be applied to any workplace. The SWS tools can be used for small projects of limited scope and impact through to large cultural change across an organisation; it all depends on the willingness of members and management to work together to make the workplace more effective. Any SWS implementation usually follows these steps:

1. Agreement

PSA members and delegates will agree with management that they want to work together differently. They then draw up a heads of agreement recording their commitments to joint governance, training, resourcing, employment security and a roll-out plan. This agreement is then taken out to members for their ratification.

“If it was up to me, I’d do it this way.”

How many times have you said these exact words? Imagine having your ideas listened to and seeing the results – that’s what Sustainable Work Systems is all about.
What are the analytical tools?

The SWS analytical tools are similar to those used in any number of “lean” programmes, such as Lean 6 Sigma, Kaizen, and Lean Production Systems. SWS focusses on value stream mapping, root cause analysis and 5S. What is key here is not the tools but your involvement as a union member in the use of these tools to transform your workplace.

Training

The joint union/management governance team agree on a trial project. The project group and governance team undertake training on working together better and using analytical tools to improve the workplace.

This helps the governance group identify any problems that might be barriers to the further roll-out of SWS.

This training is usually done by a third party so that both managers and members can fully participate in the discussions and training.

Ongoing roll-out

Once the initial training has been reviewed, the joint governance team will begin the wider roll-out of SWS across the organisation. The aim is to make this way of working self-sustaining and, in the process of doing so, transform the workplace.

For smaller implementations, after agreement and training, the next step is to agree on any subsequent projects.
Where else has the PSA done this? The PSA is involved in SWS programmes across the public sector; health, local government and the state sector. Here are some examples:

**Waitemata DHB Mental Health Services – Te Aranga Hou – from 2009**

In late 2009, the PSA and management agreed to try and manage change in a different way across the mental health services at Waitemata DHB.

The PSA and management set up a local forum to work together more closely on managing change in the service. At the same time a lean programme and training, named Te Aranga Hou, was introduced. Managers and delegates were jointly trained in lean tools and went back to their parts of the service to implement this approach to change.

This programme has focussed on service and clinical improvements. With the community mental health centres spread across north and west Auckland there was a need to standardise the levels of care clients and patients received.

**BOP DHB clerical schedulers – from 2009**

After preliminary discussions in late 2009, the DHB and the PSA decided to commit to a pilot project with clerical schedulers, the people who arrange clinic appointments, in Tauranga and Whakatane hospitals.

One aim was to reduce the number of Do Not Attends – people who don’t show up for appointments. This costs the DHB $460 per missed appointment, other patients have to wait longer for their appointments, and rooms and clinical staff are not used to their full capacity.

The other aim was to introduce a patient-centred booking service, so that people could have flexibility around their appointment times, and the staff could make better use of technology tools to support this.

A training programme was carried out over 4 months with staff from both Tauranga and Whakatane hospitals.

60% reduction in time taken to book appointments (at least!)
What do I do if I want to transform my workplace?

Have a think about how well the PSA works with your employer and what the union membership is like. Talk with your colleagues about how SWS might be effective in your workplace.

Your organiser is your first point of call to discuss this. Give them a call and they will be able to help you assess your employer’s readiness and start the discussion with management about transforming your workplace.

Ministry of Justice – Waitakere District Court – March 2013

As part of the settlement of the collective agreement with the Ministry of Justice in November 2012, it was agreed there would be a SWS trial.

A six-week pilot revised the ‘off the floors’ process at Waitakere District Court in March 2013. Over the six-week period, the number of clients sent to the cells to be served paperwork reduced by 44%. March 2013 saw the lowest number of clients waiting in cells since April 2010.

With the old system, the overall average waiting time was 40-45 minutes irrespective of where papers were served. After the trial, the average waiting time at the counter was 13 minutes, and the average waiting time in the cells was 43 minutes.

44% reduction of paperwork
Transforming the workplace is the PSA’s strategy to build a better working life for members. It has five strands for creating good jobs and improving workplaces. Sustainable Work Systems sits within the ‘Trust and Effectiveness’ strand.

For a better working life
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