Who cut the cheese ?

Once upon a time in a land close to you and in a time not so very far away from now, four little characters worked in a cheese station dishing out cheese to their community to keep them well. Two were white mice called busy and important who were in charge of cheese station zebra and two were helperpeople who were as small as mice but who looked after the people in their community. The helperpeople were called stethoscope and bedpan. Because they worked hard in cheese station zebra it was difficult to see what they were doing, but sometimes when you are sick, you find out that they do the most amazing things.

The mice, busy and important, possessing simple brains and a strong instinct for survival tried every day to make the helperpeople work as hard as they possible in dishing out the cheese. Important was the Cheese Executive of Cheese Station Zebra. Her job was to provide stracheesic leadership of the cheese station, make sure that everyone got high quality cheese and make the cheese go as far as it would stretch. Busy was the Cheese Operating Officer. His job was to manage day to day dishing out of the cheese and to provide stracheesic advice to important.

The two helperpeople, bedpan and stethoscope used their big brains, filled with an overwhelming need to look after their community by dishing out more and more cheese which they thought would make everyone feel well. Stethescope had trained for many years to develop expert knowledge and skill to diagnose what cheese sick people needed and give them their cheese to make them well. Bedpan had also received many years training her expertise and professional judgement and then spent many years dishing out the cheese that stethoscope had prescribed.

As different as the mice and helperpeople were, they shared something in common. Every morning they put on their uniforms and shiny shoes and worked in cheese station zebra

The mice, busy and important, spent a lot of time in the bureaucratic maze, a labyrinth of blind tunnels and treasure chambers, some containing delicious cheese. But there were also dark corners leading nowhere and chasms where a lot of cheese fell into, never to be seen again.

However, when the mice could find their way, the maze held secrets that allowed them to find some more cheese.

Important would sniff out where the cheese was to be found in the bureaucratic labyrinth and busy would run around gathering the cheese making very big maps to the maze called stracheesic plans. Busy and important often got lost in the bureaucratic maze, went off in the wrong direction, bumped their heads on obstacles. But after many years working in the maze they could find their way around.

Stethoscope would say who in the community got the cheese and bedpan would run around trying to give the cheese to everyone who wanted it.

Like the mice, the helperpeople, stethoscope and bedpan also used their experience to think and learn from what had happened before. However, they used most of their big brains to develop clever ways of giving out more cheese.

Some years there was a lot more cheese and they were all happy, but at other times there was only a little extra cheese that year and their powerful need to give people more cheese made them fight amongst each other and made them sad because they knew their community needed more and more cheese every year to feel well.

Nonetheless, important, busy, stethoscope and bedpan all in their different ways, knew what they were working for. Although they didn’t know where the cheese came from, or how much cheese there was supposed to be, they each found a way to dish out the cheese they found waiting for them every day every day in the big cheese store. They also had a little cheese for themselves to take home to their families.

Busy and important raced through the maze everyday, always using their experience and their very complicated stracheesic plans to find the cheese even though there appeared to be no sensible rules about how much cheese there was, or who should be getting it. When they got to work each day, the mice in their nice suits and shiny shoes immediately started their meetings to talk about how the cheese was being measured, how hard they should make the helperpeople work and how they might get to become even more busy and even more important and have a bigger store of cheese to dish out.

In the beginning, stethoscope and bedpan would also go to the meetings with busy and important to talk about how to get more cheese and who to give it to. But after a while, the helperpeople found that busy and important were not really listening to them. Stethoscope and bedpan had no idea how much cheese there was, who put it there, what it was supposed to be used for. They just assumed it would always be there and that there would be more and more cheese each year.

As soon as stethoscope and bedpan arrived at Cheese Station Zebra each morning, they put their uniforms on and went separately about their day, dishing out the cheese. They were very comfortable because there was more and more cheese each year and each year they were giving more and more cheese to the same people, thinking that the cheese would make them well. This is great, thought the helper people, we'll keep on dishing out more and more cheese every year, forever. The helperpeople felt happy and successful and thought they were doing the very best possible job for their community.

It wasn’t long before Stethoscope and Bedpan regarded the cheese they found at cheese station zebra as their own property.

To make themselves feel at home in their separate offices in Cheese Station Zebra, bedpan and stethoscope decorated the walls with certificates they'd been given for the quality of the training they’d had for dishing out the cheese and photographs of other helperpeople. They even had posters of sayings on their wall. One said:

What is the most important thing in the world ?

More cheese, more cheese, MORE CHEESE!

Bedpan and stethoscope were highly admired by their friends and the community for dishing out the cheese. They were pleased to have a growing pile of cheese to dish out. They would point to it with pride and say – “Big piece of cheese, eh !” They were particularly pleased when they could share the cheese with their bestest friends.

“We deserve all this cheese”, Stethoscope said. “We worked long and hard to know how to dish out the cheese”. He gave a particularly big piece of cheese to his BFF and went off to play golf.

Every night, the helperpeople would go home, happy with the amount of cheese they'd dished out and every morning they would ask busy and important for more.

This went on for many years

After a while, bedpan and stethoscope's confidence that they would have a lot of cheese to dish out grew and grew and they were comfortable that they would be able to keep dishing it out how they wanted.

As time went on, busy and important continued their routine. They sat in meetings from early in the morning to late at night, they counted the cheese, they ran through the maze to get more cheese, they made really stracheesic plans, they worried about how to get stethoscope and bedpan to work harder and how they might be able to get a job with a bigger pile of cheese to dish out.

One morning, busy and important arrived at cheese station zebra for a meeting with the grey old mice from the grey corridor of the maze who gave them their instructions. This time, the grey old mice told them that this year, they would not have more and more cheese to dish out, but instead would need to get by on the same amount of cheese they had last year.

They weren’t surprised. They had been told by the grey old mice each year that the next year would be a lean year with only a little extra cheese. They had held many meetings and knew instinctively what to do - they would need to stretch the cheese even further and make stethoscope and bedpan work even harder than before.

They looked at each other, shined their shoes extra shiny, straightened their ties, gathered their stracheesic plans maze and arranged to meet with bedpan and stethoscope.

The mice did not do any complicated analysis.

To the mice, the problem and the answer were both simple. The pile of cheese at cheese station zebra was not going to grow any bigger, the community were getting sicker and sicker, and so they would count the cheese even more often, stretch it to cover even more people, and tell stethoscope and bedpan to work harder.

In the meeting later that day, bedpan and stethoscope were not happy at being told the news. They wanted there to be more cheese every year so that they could use it to make people well and if there was not going to be more and more cheese, then everyone was going to get much sicker very quickly. They also felt that they were already working too hard for not enough cheese to take home to their families and they couldn’t possibly work any harder. They were cheesed off, to say the least !

Later that day, stethoscope and bedpan arrived back at their offices in cheese station zebra. They had not been in the meetings earlier in the year with the mice and so they had not realised that things were changing, so they had taken it for granted that every year there would be more and more cheese.

They were not prepared for what they had heard. "WHAT, NO MORE CHEESE!" Stethoscope yelled. He continued yelling "NO MORE CHEESE?" "NO MORE CHEESE??" as though if he shouted at bedpan loud enough the mice would give them more cheese.

"WHO CUT THE CHEESE ?" He Hollered.

Finally, stethoscope banged his fist on the table, his face turned red and he screamed at the top of his voice "I'M NOT STANDING FOR THIS".

Bedpan shook her head in disbelief. She had counted on having more and more cheese at cheese station zebra. She stood there for a long time, frozen with shock. She was just not ready for this.

Stethoscope was yelling something, but Bedpan didn’t want to hear it. She didn’t want to deal with what was facing her, so she just tuned everything out.

The helperpeople's behaviour was not very professional, but it was understandable.

The training to dish out the cheese was long and hard and it meant a great deal to the helperpeople to be able to dish the cheese out in the way they wanted to their community. This meant more to them than having their own cheese to eat at the end of the working day.

Dishing out the cheese in the way they wanted was the helperpeople's way of making other people healthy. They instinctively knew what sort of cheese was good and how much the people needed.

For bedpan, cheese meant having a good job, enough to start a family and have a little flat on wensleydale lane.

For stethoscope, dishing out the cheese meant being a Big Cheese, telling everyone else what to do and owning a big house on top of Marscapone hill.

Because dishing out more and more cheese was so important to them, the helperpeople spent a long time deciding what to do. They were suspicious that the mice were trying to fool them and that the pile of cheese was actually growing each year. They thought that they should have more cheese than other helperpeople because their work was more important to keeping the community healthy.

They ranted and raved about the injustice of it all to anyone who would listen. Stethoscope started to get depressed. How could they not believe him, when he had spent so many years learning how to dish out the cheese that made everyone feel so well.

They just couldn’t believe it. No one had warned them. It wasn’t right. It was not the way things were supposed to be. It was THEIR cheese, godammit, and they deserved to have more and more each year!

Stethoscope wrote on the whiteboard :

The mice are like diapers, they should be changed regularly, and for the same reason !

Bedpan and Stethoscope went home that night very angry with the mice, busy and important

That night, stethoscope wrote an email to busy and important and copied it to everyone he could think of:

He wrote “It is important to have more cheese every year, because without more cheese, many people will get sick and die”.

The next day, bedpan and stethoscope returned to cheese station zebra where they expected to find an email from busy and important, saying that, after all, they would continue to get more and more cheese to dish out and apologising for causing all the upset.

But the email they got back from busy and important just repeated that there would not be an increase in cheese that year, the cheese was going to be counted more often and that stethoscope and bedpan were going to have to work harder for the cheese they had been allocated by the grey old mice who ran the Cheese Board. And, by the way, Stethoscope and Bedpan were to immediately stop telling everybody that without more cheese everyone was going to get sick, or they would ‘FACE THE CONSEQUENCES’!!

The helperpeople didn’t know what to do, or what to say. Bedpan and stethoscope stood there, frozen in disbelief.

Stethoscope shut his eyes as tightly as he could and put his hands over his ears. He just wanted to block everything out. He didn’t want to know that the grey old mice had told busy and important that the cheese supply wouldn’t get bigger every year. He didn’t believe what they had said and he thought other helperpeople would unfairly get more cheese and that the mice were clearly incompetent. “Why have they cut my cheese”, he said. “What's really going on ?. They're just mice. They'll move on from cheese station zebra to a bigger pile of cheese soon. We're smarter than them. We're helperpeople. We're special. This shouldn’t be happening to us. We're entitled to more cheese every year”.

“Why ?” Bedpan asked.

“Because this problem isn’t our fault. Somebody else did this and we need to find out what's going on”. Stethoscope said

While bedpan and stethoscope were thinking about who to email next, busy and important were already working through the bureaucratic maze, looking for more cheese in every place they possibly could. Finally, they made their way into a secret area of the maze where they had never been before. There they found the biggest store of cheese they had ever seen in their lives, which was looked after by the really, really clever and very, very young mice who collected all of the cheese made by every member of the community. They asked the youngest and cleverest of mice about why cheese station zebra was not going to get more and more cheese that year.

The youngest and cleverest of mice said that the grey old mice had told them about cheese station zebra and despite having more and more cheese each year, the community were getting sicker and sicker and the helperpeople were getting more and more tired and that no one wanted to be a helperperson any more. They said that although some people, who looked like stethoscope and bedpan got some cheese, there were many who didn’t look like them who got very little cheese, the sort of cheese they didn’t like or want, or no cheese at all.

The youngest and cleverest of mice said that things had to change and that until they did, cheese station zebra would not get more and more cheese every year.

In the meantime, bedpan and stethoscope were back in cheese station zebra thinking about things. They were now realising the effects of not having more and more cheese to dish out. They were becoming more and more frustrated and angry, continuing to blame busy and important for the situation they were in.

Now and then, they thought about busy and important and wondered if they were clever enough to find some more cheese.  They knew that running through the bureaucratic maze always involved uncertainty. Sometimes stethoscope could imagine busy and important finding a new and bigger cheese station. He thought that new mice might be able to do a better job and find more cheese. He savoured in his mind the email he would send when they announced their departure.

The more clearly that stethoscope saw an image of himself finding and enjoying the big pile of cheese brought in by more competent mice, the more he saw busy and important leaving cheese station zebra. “Let's write a really stinking email to everyone about busy and important”, he said, “We'll tell everyone that it's their fault that people are getting sicker, because they can’t find us more cheese”.

“No”, bedpan quickly responded. “I don’t think it's the fault of busy and important. I think they are doing their best and i'm comfortable working with them. You don’t know that new mice would be any better. Busy and important understand the bureaucratic maze and they want to help people stay well”.

With that, Stethoscope's hope of getting new mice who could find more cheese for cheese station zebra quickly faded.

So, everyday, the helperpeople continued to give out the cheese the way they had always done, but found that they were giving less and less to each person who came to see them. They went home from the cheese station carrying their worries and frustrations with them. They saw less and less of their friends. They tried to deny what was happening, but found it harder to get to sleep, had less energy the next day and were becoming more and more irritable. They had nightmares about the lack of cheese and people who came to see them for cheese and who looked up to them becoming sicker and sicker.

But stethoscope and bedpan still returned to cheese station zebra every day and worked harder and harder, because there were more sick people to see than ever, and because no one wanted to be a helperperson anymore.

Eventually, bedpan and stethoscope realised that working harder and harder in the same way they always done, to dish out less and less cheese in the same way to more and more people just wasn’t working. They wrote on the blackboard:

Worry is dishing out tomorrow’s cheese today

By now, the helperpeople were starting to burnout from the long hours and stress. Stethoscope was getting tired of just waiting for the situation to improve. He started to realise that the longer they continued to do what they had always done for the people that they had always done this for, the worse the situation was going to get.

Finally, one day, stethoscope began laughing at himself. "Bedpan, bedpan, look at us. We keep doing the same thing over and over again and wonder why things don’t get any better. If this wasn’t so serious, it would be funny"

Stethoscope and bedpan didn’t like the idea of changing doing what they'd always done, after all, they'd been doing the same thing successfully for many, many years and they had always kept people from being sick, hadn’t they ?

Bedpan said "sometimes things change and they are never going to be the same again. This looks like one of those times. Life moves on, and so should we!"

Bedpan wrote a saying on the whiteboard. It said

"Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine"

Stethoscope stared at the whiteboard for a long time. Bedpan knew he was still thinking – ‘Who cut my cheese’. Bedpan knew that he had worked very hard for many years to be an expert in dishing out the cheese and was anxious about moving away from a way of dishing out the cheese that had been so successful for so long and made stethoscope so respected in the community, particularly amongst his friends. Finally, stethoscope wrote something on the whiteboard that he remembered hearing once:

Be the change you want to see in the world

He thought about what was stopping him from making a change

He knew that sometimes, fear can be good if it makes you take action when you are afraid that things will get worse if you don’t do anything. But it is not good when you are so afraid of change that it stops you from doing anything. He thought of changing the way he dished out the cheese and felt the fear of doing something new.

Then he took a deep breath and wrote on the whiteboard :

Feel the fear and do it anyway

As he thought about the changes he could make in dishing out the cheese, he started to become worried that he had waited too long to make the changes. It was now going to be more painful to change the way he dished out the cheese.

He decided that if he ever got the chance again, he would get out of his comfort zone and make the changes quicker. He knew this would make things easier

Then stethoscope smiled a weak smile as he thought "It’s sometimes better to let things go, because they are heavy"

During the next few days, stethoscope and bedpan thought about the cheese and started to explore the bureaucratic maze. Just when they seemed to be making progress in finding someone who could help them find more cheese, they would get lost in the corridors of power, spending many hours with mice before realising that those particular mice had no particular decision making authority, but did seem to want them to come to their meetings. They thought to themselves ‘if you get two helperpeople alone in a cheese station, they’ll for a queue. If you get two mice together alone in a cheese station, they’ll form a committee’. It seemed that progress was two steps forward and one step back.

As time went on, Bedpan and Stethoscope began to despair of ever finding a decision maker amongst the mice who could help them find more cheese. Bedpan thought back to the cheese and ham omelette she had for lunch and to the mice who wanted them to join their meetings that never took any decisions. She thought that in the making of her omelette, ‘the chicken had an interest, but the pig was committed’.

Whenever bedpan and stethescope became discouraged, they reminded themselves that, however uncomfortable the situation was, it was much better to actively take control rather than blaming others for unfair things happening to them.

As they came up against the barriers in the bureaucratic maze, they began to appreciate the skills of busy and important and that they would need help navigating the corridors of power. Bedpan and stethoscope thought about the times they had raced through the bureaucratic maze on their own and wrote on the whiteboard :

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, got together

They began to realise that there was still some cheese to de dished out from cheese station zebra, but that to keep people well, the cheese would need to be dished out in different ways.

They began to think back on the meetings they had missed with busy and important and to realise that they needed help from the mice. They began to realise that they had no idea if dishing out more cheese year after year had been stopping people become sick. The amount of cheese dished out to each person had been reducing every year and what was left had grown old. It didn’t taste as good. Mould may even have started to grow on the cheese, although they hadn’t noticed it. They began to see that years ago, they had training to understand the quality of the cheese they had been dishing out, but hadn’t used this and had no idea if the cheese was making people better or sicker.

They realised that busy and important had seen the change coming, but had taken the wrong actions to try to spread the cheese more thinly, pare down to the rind and get the helperpeople to work harder and harder doing the same thing, whilst having an unhealthy obsession with counting the cheese.

Bedpan stopped to think and then wrote on the whiteboard:

Wake Up and Smell the Cheese

Stethoscope and bedpan were becoming discouraged and thought about giving up and just doing the minimum to guarantee taking home a little cheese to their families. They often wondered if they were still being weighed down by fearful beliefs of letting down their friends and community. The bureaucratic maze seemed to be collapsing in on them, crushing them with the weight of meetings and stracheesic plans with every step forward like moving through cream cheese. Then they realised that they felt their best when moving forward, even if this was only very slowly, and that having more and more cheese every year had blocked them

Stethoscope stopped to write on the white board : Having more and more cheese gets you blocked and stops you moving forward.

Bedpan looked down the dark passageway of bureaucracy and was aware of her fear. What lay ahead - more meetings, more business cases to write, more mice without decision making authority to schmoose? Then she laughed at herself. She realised that these fears were making things worse. So, she did what she would do if she wasn’t afraid. She moved in a new direction.

As she started running down the dark passageway, she began to smile. Bedpan didn’t realise it yet, but she was rediscovering what had got her into this line of work in the first place, what brought her joy.

‘Why do I feel so good ?’ she wondered. ‘We aren’t getting more cheese and i don’t know where i'm going’. Before long she realised why she felt so good. She paused to write on the whiteboard "

When you feel the fear and do it anyway, you feel good

Bedpan and stethoscope realised that they had been frozen by their own fear. Moving in a new direction, however slowly, had freed them

Now they began to understand a little more about the bureaucratic maze and how this might lead to more cheese.

To make things even better, they began to see in their minds eye, a picture of themselves having fresh new cheese to dish out, and that this would make people feel more well. They saw themselves in great realistic detail dishing out a wide variety of cheese from edam to camembert ! Then they began to imagine how people would feel as they ate those delicious, fresh cheeses. The more clearly they saw an image of themselves dishing out new cheeses and the faces of the people as the cheese made them well, the more real and believable it became.

Stethoscope wrote : Imagining yourself dishing out new cheese leads you to find it.

Stethoscope began thinking about what could be done to help people improve their health instead of being fearful about them losing it. He wondered why he had always thought that a change in how the cheese was dished out would lead to something worse. Now, he realised that changing what he did could lead to something better.

‘Why didn’t I see this before’, he asked himself

Then he began to find his way through the bureaucratic maze with more certainty, attending meetings when decision makers were present. Before long, he started to spot fresh piles of cheese down the dark corridors of the bureaucratic maze, with opportunities to dish out cheese for pilot projects and understood the need to provide evidence that giving people the new cheese was actually improving their health. He understood that providing evidence of outcomes of giving people the new cheese, rather than loudly asserting his personal opinion, made it easier to find new cheese in the labyrinth

He wrote on the whiteboard : In God we trust, all others bring data

After a while, stethoscope made his way back to cheese station zebra and offered bedpan some of the new cheese to dish out. Bedpan appreciated stethoscope's gesture but said "I don’t think i would like to dish out new cheese. It's not what i'm used to dishing out and I don’t want to get in trouble. I want more of the old cheese to dish out and i'm not going to change until I get what I want.”

Stethoscope shook his head in disappointment and reluctantly continued to dish out the new cheese on his own. He realised that what made him happy wasn’t just having new cheese to dish out. He was happy because he wasn’t being driven by his fear, frustration and anger. He liked what he was doing now. Realising that he was no longer feeling burnt out, but was joyful in his work with a new strength. He now felt that it was only a matter of time before he could find a way to give all his community the fresh new cheese they needed to make them healthy.

He paused to write on the whiteboard : A wise man changes his mind, a fool never will

Bedpan kept thinking about what she could gain instead of what she was losing. She wondered why she had always thought that a change would lead to something worse. Now she realised that a change could lead to something better. She had been so concerned about making a mistake that she would be criticised for that she had been happier to keep dishing out the mouldy old cheese that nobody really liked rather than trying something new. ‘Why didn’t I see this before, she asked herself’.

Then she entered the bureaucratic maze and before long, started to see some small piles of new cheese that could be dished out. She tried them and found the taste to be different, but delicious. She thought that by dishing out small amounts of cheese to a small number of people that if the results were bad, that she wouldn’t be criticised for such a small trial. So, she designed a number of trials of the new cheeses, dishing these out in a random way to people in what she called a randomised cheese trial. For each small randomised cheese trial, she first planned how she would dish out one of the new cheeses and who she would try it on. Then she dished out the cheese and studied what happened. Some of these were not successful and she soon stopped them. Others were successful and this gave her a very good idea of what sort of cheese was best for which people.

Bedpan only had a few small trial pieces. She began to wonder why she had wanted to keep dishing out the old, partially mouldy cheese when there was new cheese available. She thought that there was far better cheese ahead than the cheese she had left behind.

She paused to write on the whiteboard:

Doing small randomised cheese trials that are safe to fail helps you let go of your fear of being criticised, and helps you to dish out new cheese sooner.

After a while, bedpan realised something new. The people coming forward for the new cheese often looked different to her. They didn’t come to see her in shiny clothes like she was used to. They spoke differently. They needed more of her time. But when they came back, it seemed that the new cheese was actually making them better. Bedpan realised that in taking more of her time, she was connecting with the different ones, getting to understand their lives and building a relationship with them.

Bedpan thought about this and decided to make some notes about the results that she was getting with the new cheese. She realised that she was getting better results, not just because of the new cheese, but because of the relationships she was building. She wrote on the whiteboard:

Cheese is necessary but not sufficient

Stethoscope knew that everything would have been much better now if he had dealt sooner with the fact there wasn’t going to be more and more of the old cheese every year. He was no longer feeling burnt out, had more energy and was optimistic about the future.

He knew that he could have been dishing out the new cheese much sooner if he had listened to the mice about the changes that were coming, rather than denying it and blaming the mice for not doing a good job and only wanting to move to a bigger cheese station.

Stethoscope used his imagination again and pictured himself dishing out new cheese and making people feel much better. He began to realise that he had been able to give each person less and less of the mouldy old cheese and he wasn’t sure if it had been making them feel better at all. He decided to go into the bureaucratic maze and look for little pieces of new cheese here and there. He began to feel better about himself.

He also began to realise that the mice had been doing their best and knew quite a lot about how to find cheese in the bureaucratic maze.

He wrote on the whiteboard : Everything is difficult, until it becomes easy

Stethoscope also began to have a nagging worry that despite all his years of training to dish out the cheese, he didn’t know if he had been making people feel better at all. They seemed grateful to him for dishing out the cheese, even if there wasn’t much of it and it was mouldy. He started to think about how he would know what sort of cheese people wanted. Suddenly he had an amazing idea – “Why don’t I ask the people what sort of cheese would make them feel better" he said to himself. But how to do this ? This hadn’t been covered in his training. It was just assumed that after all the years of working, he would automatically know what sort of cheese people wanted, what was best for them and so there was no need to bother about writing notes about what effect the cheese was actually having.

Whilst the helperpeople had been dishing out small amounts of new cheese and coming to these realisations, the mice, busy and important, had been working their way further and further into the bureaucratic maze until they again found the very very young and very very clever mice. These oh so young and oh so clever mice were in charge of bringing in and allocating all the cheese made by all the people. The young and clever mice were worried because they had been told by the grey old mice that despite all the extra cheese they gave every year to all the cheese stations, that nobody seemed to be getting more well. The young and clever mice were particularly worried that some people were getting no cheese at all, and these were the people who would benefit the most from getting the cheese. These people were the ones who made most of the cheese and the really young and extremely clever mice were very concerned that if they became too sick to work making the cheese that the amount of cheese to be dished out to everyone would get smaller and smaller. They told busy and important what the old grey mice in a grey corridor in the bureaucratic labyrinth had told them about how much and what sort of cheese should go to each cheese station.

These old grey mice, in their old grey corridor were the ones who had been making busy and important count the cheese and hold lots of meetings and write lots of stracheesic plans, stretch the cheese and make the helperpeople work harder every year for the same piece of cheese to take home. These old and grey mice had also told busy and important that if they did these things very well for a very, very, long time, then someday they too could work in the grey corner of the labyrinth.

The mice, busy and important, gradually realised that what they really, really, really wanted to do was to help people to be more well. They weren’t so interested in having a bigger cheese station, or eventually working with the grey old mice in the grey corridor. They didn’t want to spend all of their days in pointless meetings, or counting the cheese, or trying to tell the helperpeople what to do, or tell them to work harder and spread the cheese out more and more thinly or see the people given the mouldy old cheese that they didn’t really want.

The mice wrote on the whiteboard :

The old grey bureaucratic mice are like cheese, the older they are, the higher they become

But how to make sure that all the people, and not just those that looked like the helperpeople got the cheese they wanted, and which would make them feel well, if they needed the cheese to feel well. "I know" said important. Let’s catch up with stethoscope and bedpan and tell them about what the ever so young and clever mice told us, and use their big brains to see how we can get a reliable supply of the new cheese.

So, busy sent stethoscope and bedpan an ever so nice email which said that they would really, really like to talk to them about the cheese situation and if they could meet after the day’s work of dishing out the cheese had finished, they would bring a little piece of cheese for them all to enjoy and it would be nice new cheese and not mouldy old cheese.

Stethoscope and bedpan had never had a nice or helpful or considerate email from the mice before, and they smelt a rat. Nevertheless, they looked at all the helpful things they had written on the whiteboard and decided to give the mice the benefit of the doubt, just one more time.

So, the next evening, busy and important and stethoscope and bedpan sat down to talk the whole thing through. The mice told the helperpeople about the worries that the oh so young and clever mice had about more and more of the old cheese not seeming to do anyone any good and that the different people never got any of the cheese and the cheese was old and mouldy anyway. They told them how the young and clever mice needed some proof that the cheese was doing people good. They wrote on the whiteboard:

What’s important gets measured, and what gets measured gets done

Stethoscope and bedpan told the mice about the small portions of new cheese that they had found in the labyrinth, how the different people seemed to like it and it seemed to be making people more well, although it was taking more of their time and the different people took some getting used to, what with their funny ways.

Oh, it was a convivial meeting and the mice and the helperpeople realised that they all wanted the same thing - to make people feel better. The mice told the helperpeople that they no longer thought they were lazy slackers who were too set in their ways and wanted to finish their work early so they could go and play golf.

The helperpeople said they no longer thought that the mice were only interested in counting the cheese and telling them what to do so they could preside over a bigger cheese pile than cheese station zebra and after a very, very long time, work with the grey old mice in the grey corridor.

When they were all getting along and after they had shared the small piece of cheese they thought they could get down to business.

"Right' said stethoscope. What do you mice think. "Well" said important "We would like the oh so young and oh so clever mice who look after all the cheese in the world, to make sure that cheese station zebra has a reliable supply of the new cheeses each year"

"Okay" said stethoscope "and we would like to make sure that when people get the cheese it is actually making them feel better"

"Well, that’s great" said busy "because the young and clever mice have said that if we can show them that the cheese is actually making people feel better, particularly the different people, then they will make sure we get all the cheese we need"

"And" said bedpan "We need to make sure that we can get the cheese to people who might find it difficult to get to cheese station zebra"

"That’s right" said important "The oh so young and oh so clever mice who look after all the cheese are particularly keen on that. But how will we know what sort of cheese people like and how we can get the cheese to them. We've never thought about this before. we were too busy counting the cheese"

“And” said busy, “how can we possible manage cheese station zebra if we are dishing out two hundred and forty six different types of cheese”

Using their big brains, stethoscope and bedpan said together "We'll ask the people, including the different ones and we'll make sure that we ask the people who have never had any cheese before, and the ones who had old mouldy cheese and the ones who had the small amounts of new cheese"

And stethoscope said “you should never commit yourself to a cheese without having first examined it and thanks to bedpan doing all those randomised cheese trials, we now know the small number of cheeses we need to make all the people feel really well’.

The mice and the helperpeople thought back to when they had more and more cheese every year, and had fear of change. They thought about what was different now. The wrote on the whiteboard :

We now have a sense of security, we feel safe to raise difficulties and sensitive issues because we now work in an environment that supports and values open conversations

Together, we have a sense of belonging, feel part of a group with strong trusting relationships who share similar values and beliefs which connect us and we know our contribution is recognised and celebrated

All of us have a shared sense of purpose and we like to know what matters to each other and what inspires us to do our best work

In cheese station zebra we now have a sense of continuity where we are all interested in making connections and links to our previous experiences that we can draw on

We now feel a joint sense of achievement where we are positive about our contribution and everyone can give and receive feedback about what we have noticed and what we value

Now, we feel that our work together gives us a sense of significance where our everyday efforts are noticed and appreciated and we knowing that what we do is making a difference to our community

So, my friends, because busy and important and stethoscope and bedpan now no longer felt fear of change, they felt confident to ask the people about the cheese they wanted. They found the people who looked like them who had been given the mouldy old cheese and they found the people who looked different from them who had enjoyed the limited supply of the new cheese and they found the people who looked different from them who had not had any of the mouldy old cheese or the limited supply of the new cheese.

Using her experiences in working with the different people, bedpan was able to understand how to do things together in partnership. She knew that the people who worked at cheese station zebra and the young and clever mice and the grey old mice had a lot of knowledge and power. She knew that to successfully work with the people who queued up for the cheese that they would need to truly share this power. She realised that to work together as equals that the people who queued up for the cheese would need to have as much knowledge about how cheese station zebra worked and about the cheese as she did. So she decided that before she organised a big meeting, she would give everyone information to read that would make sure that they all started with the same understanding of the cheese. On her whiteboard, she wrote : Preparation

In her work in the maze with the mice and with stethoscope and the different people, she realised that they all had particular ways of thinking about the cheese and wanted to achieve different things. The oh so young and clever mice wanted to get the best outcomes from the cheese. She and stethoscope wanted the cheese to make people as well as possible. The people who queued for the cheese wanted different things, but mostly they wanted the helperpeople to listen to them and understand all of the complicated things about their lives and their families and were often given lots of different sorts of cheese by different helperpeople at cheese station zebra and at other cheese stations. On her whiteboard, bedpan added to Preparation and wrote : Preparation, Agenda.

From her work with the small pieces of new cheese, bedpan knew that she frequently needed to find out more about the people she was helping and they needed to go away and talk things over with their families and think about things before making cheese decisions. On her whiteboard, bedpan added Further information to Preparation and Agenda and wrote : Preparation, Agenda, Further Information.

Bedpan knew that when she got together again with the people who queued for the cheese and they had been prepared for the initial conversation and she had found out about what they were wanting in their complicated lives and they all now had enough information to make a decision, that they could discuss the options open to them. These options might be a choice between the different sorts of cheese or might even be no cheese at all ! On her whiteboard, bedpan added Discuss Options to Further information, Preparation and Agenda and wrote : Preparation, Agenda, Further Information, Discuss Options.

Bedpan knew that it was often difficult for people to choose between different options, so she wrote a simple guide to each, which she called an options grid. This had the benefits and issues of each cheese option, including the ‘no cheese’ option. This was helpful in helping the people choose which option to choose, deciding on the way forward. On her whiteboard, bedpan added Agree Way Forward to Discuss Options, Further information, Preparation and Agenda and wrote : Preparation, Agenda, Further Information, Discuss Options, Agree Way Forward.

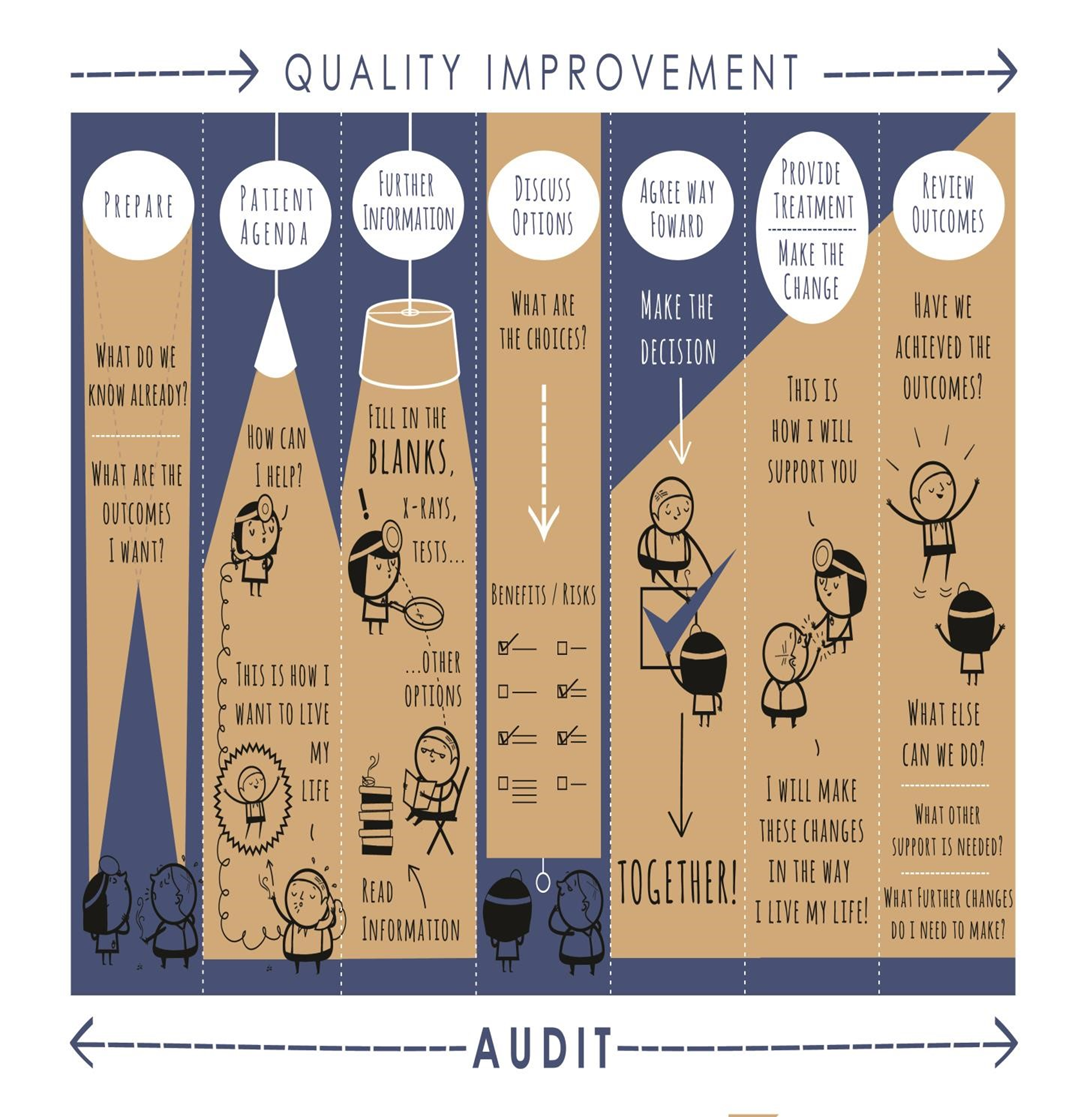
Bedpan knew from Stethoscope that cheese was necessary, but not sufficient for the people to feel well. She knew that the people often needed help to change some of the ways they lived their lives if they wanted to feel well. She had set up some groups of people with similar problems and trained some of them to provide support for people to self manage their health. On her whiteboard, bedpan added Implementation to Agree Way Forward, Discuss Options, Further information, Preparation and Agenda and wrote : Preparation, Agenda, Further Information, Discuss Options, Agree Way Forward, Implementation.

Her work with the different people had shown bedpan that having given them the cheese and the people working on their lifestyle, that there was a need to see them again, to see how they were doing and make any changes needed to their programme. On her whiteboard, bedpan added Review to Implementation, Agree Way Forward, Discuss Options, Further information, Preparation and Agenda and wrote : Preparation, Agenda, Further Information, Discuss Options, Agree Way Forward, Implementation, Review.

When she had written this, and was looking at her whiteboard, she thought of the oh so young and clever mice who wanted to know that the cheese was making a difference to the lives of those who queued up to get it. She had been making notes on the outcomes of those who had been taking the new cheeses and now she was able to look at the results for the groups of people with the same characteristics to check how they were doing. She knew that she could change the type of cheese or the way she worked with the people, depending on the results she was getting from her clinical audit.

Bedpan thought back to the mouldy old cheese that she and stethoscope had been dishing out without making a connection to the people who had been receiving it and that the different people had not been getting any cheese. She remembered when she had seen ‘change is inevitable, except from a vending machine’ written on the whiteboard. This made her think that rather than waiting for the cheese to become old and mouldy that she and stethoscope should intentionally seek out new cheese and new ways of interacting and find new people who would benefit from these innovations.

Then she stood back from the whiteboard where she had written Preparation, Agenda, Further Information, Discuss Options, Agree Way Forward, Implementation, Review and wrote underneath ‘Clinical Audit’ and ‘Innovation’. She then drew a picture, which looked like this



Bedpan asked stethoscope and busy and important to join her in front of the whiteboard and showed them her plan for working with the people.

“This will work when we see the people in cheese station zebra” said stethoscope.

“And, it will work when we get everyone together to find out what cheese everyone wants” said busy.

“And it will also work when we get together for our meetings” said important.

And then they got all of the people together and asked them all about what kept them healthy and well and how the cheese might help with this.

The results were surprising to everyone.

They now had a brand new whiteboard and they wrote on it

Nobody really liked the mouldy old cheese that we thought was so good for them

We didn’t really need more and more of the same old mouldy cheese each year

We were giving each of the people less and less of the mouldy old cheese every year

What we were doing was making us mice and us helperpeople sick and we were all unhappy

Because no one wanted to join us mice or us helperpeople, we were becoming burnt out and miserable and we were always worried about the future

When we were counting the cheese, or being in meetings or telling people what to do (because we knew best) just because the old grey mice wanted us to, we were not making people feel better at all

The people who look like us don’t need as much cheese to keep well

The people who are different to us are the ones making all the cheese and they need more cheese and more of our time to keep them healthy

In fact, the ‘different’ people are not so different after all.

We cannot wait in cheese station zebra for people to come and see us to get their cheese, because many of them live far away and can’t get to us, so we must take the cheese to them

What is the most important thing in the world – it is people, it is people, it is people

Well, dear friends, the mice and the helper people acted on these thoughts the very next day and soon all the mice and all the helperpeople from all the other cheese stations were coming to see them to learn about how to make the best use of the cheese and how to write down what was happening when the people including the people who looked like them and the different ones got just the type of cheese and the amount of cheese they needed to stay well and that Stethoscope and Bedpan often travelled far away from cheese station zebra to make sure that everyone got their cheese.

The notes that busy and important sent to the oh so young and oh so clever mice who looked after all the cheese in the world so pleased them that cheese station zebra soon had a reliable supply of the right cheeses. And soon after that, all the cheese stations, who had also changed how they dished out the cheese were given a reliable source of cheese

Of course, this meant that more and more people wanted to be helperpeople and so stethoscope and bedpan had more enjoyable working lives and were always thanked by all the people they met, even the ones that looked different to them

After a while, the oh so young and oh so clever mice who looked after all the cheese in the world found that the people *were* making more and more cheese, because they were well.

Finally, when busy and important had done all they could to make cheese station zebra a success, they took over the grey corridor from the old grey mice and they never made the new mice at cheese station zebra spend so much time counting the cheese or tell the helperpeople what to do or to work harder or write so many long plans that got lost in the maze, which was never what the oh so young and oh so clever mice had wanted in the first place. Instead, all the mice spent their time asking the helperpeople with their big brains about how the people were getting on, and what effect the cheese was having on the people's lives and what they should be thinking about doing next (because change is inevitable, except from a vending machine).

And most of all, the mice and the helperpeople spent much of their time talking to the people who looked like them and the different people about what cheese they needed and how this was making them feel. Because, after all, it was the people who owned all the cheese stations and made sure that the mice and the helper people had some cheese to take back to their families and most important of all, it was the people who had made all the cheese in the first place