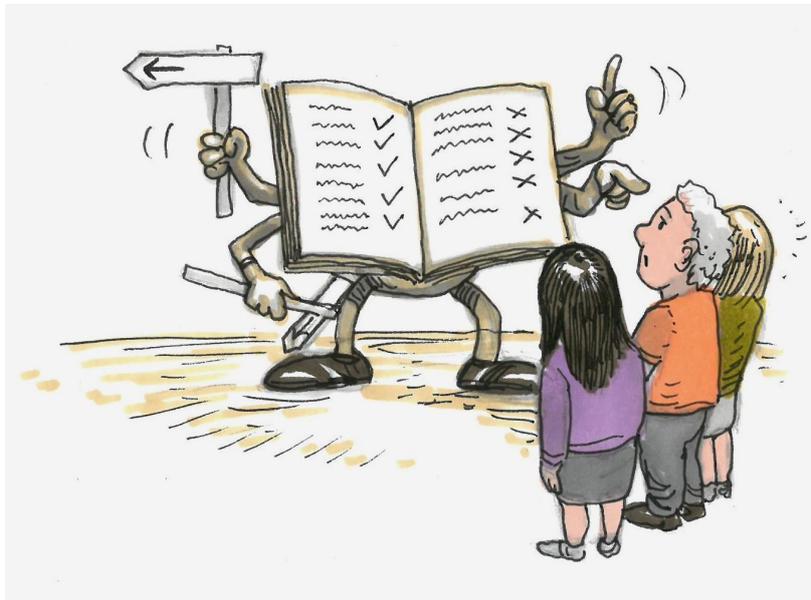


Sticking to the script:
a story about knowledge sharing in a
community health & social care team



by Vicky Ward

with illustrations by
James McKay

This story is based on data collected by observing the work of a community health and social care team during an independent research project funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The characters named in the story are fictional and not based on any one individual.

Special thanks go to Neal Beckwith, Tessa Holmes, Joe Langley, Zane Linde-Ozola, Janine Morton, Alison Powell, David Woodcock and Mohammed Zaman for their help with analysing the data and producing this story.

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This story is about the Lakeside community health and social care team. The team is made up of lots of different health and social care professionals like nurses, social workers and physiotherapists. Their job is to work together to look after people living in the local community. This is the story of what their knowledge sharing looks like.

The story is designed to illustrate a number of lessons about how groups of people share knowledge. At these points you will find a box containing a short commentary and some questions which could be used to encourage knowledge sharing. At the end of the story you will find a short summary of these lessons and some further details about the questions.



This is Ellie. Each week Ellie meets with her colleagues from the Lakeside team to talk about the people they are looking after.

Some of Ellie's colleagues don't seem very keen on these meetings. They sometimes talk as if they are being forced to have them and don't really know what they are for. It's almost as if they feel they have a gun to their heads.



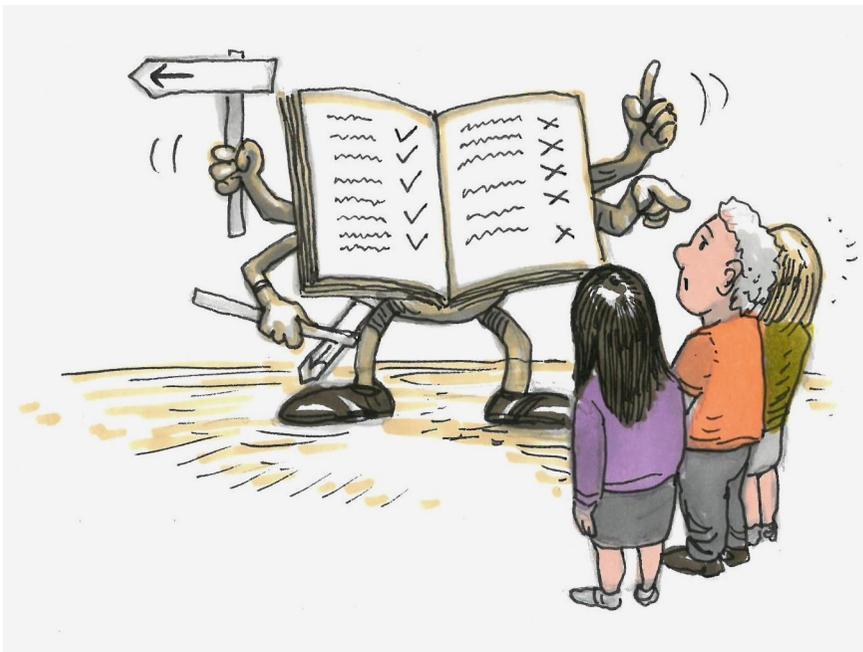
Meetings are an important setting for groups of people to share knowledge with one another. It can be difficult to share knowledge if people in the group don't recognise the value of meetings, don't want to be there or have different ideas about what they should be doing. Focusing on a common goal could help. A question to help is "what is the issue we need to address?"



A lot of the people that Ellie and her colleagues look after have very complex lives and needs. To work out how to help them, Ellie knows that they will have to get creative. She thinks that the meetings she has with her colleagues should be helpful and should give them a space to come up with creative ideas.

The meetings don't always work out like that, though. Often the meetings feel rigid and inflexible. It's almost like they are being guided by a script or a rule book. There doesn't seem to be a lot of room for sharing ideas and feelings.

Creative and critical reflection can enable groups of people to share knowledge and ideas and develop innovative and creative solutions to difficult problems. It can be difficult for groups of people to think and reflect together. Questions to help include "what do we think about this situation?" and "what is the underlying issue?"





Most of Ellie's colleagues seem to be there to report what they have already done or decided to do to help someone they are looking after. They mainly seem to focus on facts and logistics.

To Ellie it sometimes looks as if the people they are looking after have been reduced to numbers and the meetings are a box to be ticked.

Uncertainty is a vital starting point for sharing knowledge and often encourages people to contribute a wide range of knowledge and ideas to a group discussion. It can be difficult for groups of people to admit and talk about uncertainty. A question which could help is “what are we worried about?”

Ellie sometimes finds it difficult to contribute her knowledge and experience during the meeting, especially if she hasn't met the person who is being talked about.



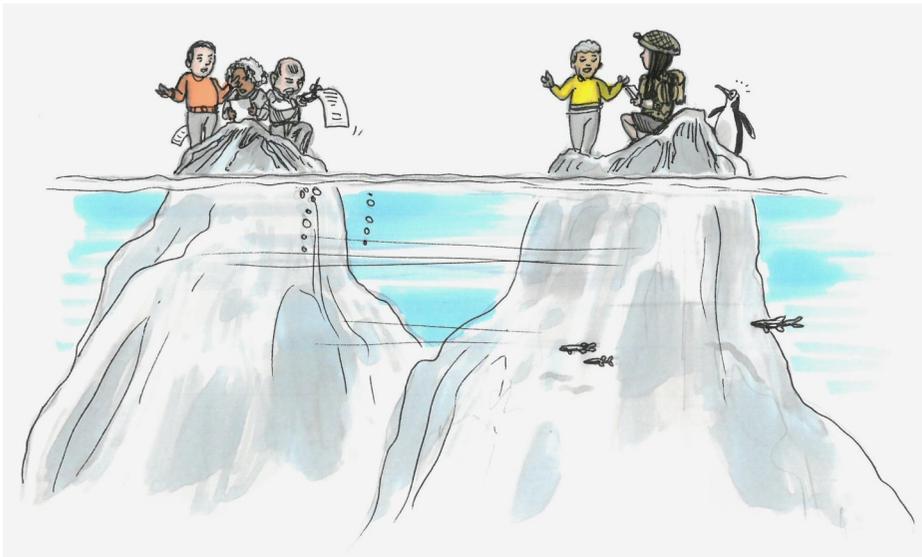
It can feel as if team members are quite protective of the people they are looking after and their ways of working and sometimes Ellie isn't sure if they are interested in coming up with shared solutions and ideas. She often finds it easier to switch off and not try to join in with the discussion because it all feels a bit prickly.

When people are dealing with challenging situations (like how best to help someone with complex needs) it can be difficult for them to receive knowledge and ideas from other members of a group and to recognise the value of that knowledge. Questions to help include “has anyone else dealt with a similar situation?” and “who else might know something about this situation?”



When Ellie comes to the meeting, she usually comes armed with a list of bullet points about each of the people she is looking after. These lists help to keep the meeting moving, but it often feels as if the knowledge they contain is fairly superficial.

When Ellie hears her colleague's lists she is often left with the sense that they are only passing on the tip of the iceberg and aren't sharing everything they know about the person they are talking about.



Groups of people often use documents as a way of capturing and summarising knowledge. Some knowledge (like thoughts and experiences) is difficult to write down and needs to be shared in other ways. A question which could help is “how do we capture what we know?”



Every now and then one of the reports that Ellie brings to the meeting seems to contain something which sparks her colleague's interest. When this happens they start to listen to what she is saying and often a discussion will take off that helps them to share their knowledge and past experiences.

This often helps them to come up with a new idea or approach for Ellie to try. But Ellie is never quite sure what it is about her report that sparks this interest and makes people share their knowledge with her.

Curiosity and interest are important parts of how and why groups of people share knowledge. Listening to one another and asking questions can encourage curiosity and learning.



Even if knowledge sharing does take off, it usually grinds to a halt if Ellie and her colleagues run out of ideas or hit some kind of barrier. If the barrier comes from another team or service, Ellie and her colleagues often find themselves giving up rather than talking together about how they can find a way round it.

Sharing knowledge is difficult and groups of people often lose momentum before they are able to make use of the knowledge they have shared. Rules and barriers elsewhere in the system can also make it difficult to use knowledge. Questions to help include “what do we need to know to move forward?” and “how do we use what we know to develop a solution?”

This story has illustrated a number of important lessons about knowledge sharing. In summary, the Lakeside team are able to share knowledge with one another when they listen to one another and are interested in and curious about what is being said.

The team face a number of challenges when trying to share knowledge. They find it difficult to recognise the value of meetings as an opportunity for sharing knowledge and developing creative solutions. They also find it difficult to think and reflect together and to receive knowledge and ideas from one another. Relying on lists and documents stops them sharing some types of knowledge and they sometimes find it difficult to use the knowledge which they have shared.

One way of dealing with these and other challenges is to ask questions like those shown in the boxes on the previous pages. These questions have been designed to help groups of people to share knowledge when they are dealing with difficult situations where there are no clear answers (such as how best to help someone with complex needs). The questions focus on helping groups of people to think and talk about their main area of concern, what they do and don't know and how they will access and use knowledge to address the situation they are dealing with.

For details of where you can find out more about these knowledge sharing questions please turn the page.

About the author

Vicky Ward is an academic from the University of St Andrews. Her work focuses on how people share knowledge with each other and how they can be supported to do so.

Between October 2014 and November 2016 she looked at how knowledge was shared during case management meetings in community health and social care teams. She also developed and tested a set of questions designed to help these teams to share knowledge.

To find out more about the project and download resources please visit

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