**Is de-implementation the key to supporting staff wellbeing?**

*Transforming Schools to Become Thriving Workplaces*

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In education, we are great at adding things to our to-do lists, to our visions, to meeting agendas. We add, add, add, but very rarely do we stop and take things away.

The need to always add more is an educational phenomenon. Do we do it because we feel we are not enough, because we are trying to keep up with everyone and everything else, or because we don’t really know what we are doing? Something is better than nothing, isn’t it?

In his book, [De-implementation - Creating the Space to Focus on What Works](https://www.amazon.com/implementation-Creating-Space-Focus-Works/dp/1071885219). Peter De Witt sums up the phenomena of what always doing more in the education space means:

*To some it is called progress, but to others it is called overconsumption. We passively consume curriculum, content, technology tools, and words at meetings as if we are playing the supporting role in our own lives. What makes it worse is that we consume because we have the fear of missing out (FOMO), so we begin to rally our troops in the war of overconsumption. This combination of FOMO and our need to consume new things contributes to why we over-implement and leads to the anxiety and exhaustion we feel.*

What strikes me here is the last sentence, *that this approach leads to the anxiety and exhaustion we feel.* Right now, as we tackle teacher wellbeing and workloads, and look for ways to reduce stress, it seems de-implementation might be the way forward.

But what exactly is de-implementation?

As the name suggests it is the opposite of implementing. Stopping. Ceasing. Removing. It is to end something that is no longer needed or serves a purpose, to cease something that no longer has effect or impact, or to stop something because it isn’t good for us.

[McKay et al (2018)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29971792/) suggest three criteria for identifying interventions appropriate for de-implementation:

1. interventions that are not effective or that are harmful,
2. interventions that are not the most effective or efficient to provide, and
3. interventions that are no longer necessary.

In a school setting that’s hard to grasp. What are we doing that is ineffective, harmful, not efficient, or no longer necessary? Doesn’t everything matter? Perhaps, but does everything matter the same, and if we have so many things we are focusing on, are any happening as well as they could?

It’s not uncommon to hear of a school that has invested thousands of dollars in a program only to have them change it and do it differently because they need it to match another similar program they are still going to use, or that a meeting has been added to the weekly schedule without one being removed, or how teachers have to frequently replan their weeks because the weekly overview goes out on a Sunday evening and there are always last minute changes and interruptions. Are these examples of adding when we should be deleting, inefficient systems, and things that are no longer necessary? I think they are.

The problem in schools, along with FOMO, is that we want it all. We want the 3-tiered cake with the jam and cream filling, the icing, decorations, and moving parts. We want it all, so we keep adding.

Adding, without taking away, or adding more icing and decorations, and not focusing on the foundation, is dramatically impacting staff wellbeing. It is not time to add more, instead, it is time to pull back these layers, remove the jam, the cream and the moving parts, and get back to what really matters. Strong foundations, supportive infrastructure, and consistency. We need to focus on building safe workplaces, with positive cultures, and ensuring there is a shared, transparent, vision that everyone knows, understands and sticks to.

So, in order to do this, we need to ask ourselves, what is the icing? What is the jam? What is the cream? What are the layers? Can we de-implement any for the sake of building a better workplace to support staff wellbeing, reduce stress and anxiety, and stop our teachers from feeling exhausted?

This idea is certainly worth exploring, and one you can do with the following questions?

* Does x support our vision?
* Is x efficient? E.g. is the system, structure or process used efficiently?
* Is x effective and impactful?
* Is x safe and supportive of the work we do and our culture?
* Is there a better way to do x?
* What would happen if we stopped x?
* Do we still need x?
* If we implement x, what are we going to remove?

I understand the need to want to grow, evolve and follow the research or the next best thing. There are many bright, shiny lights in education. However, there is no point in sticking with something if it doesn’t serve us anymore.

It is time to not focus on what else, but instead on what we can, and should, de-implement.

**References:**

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