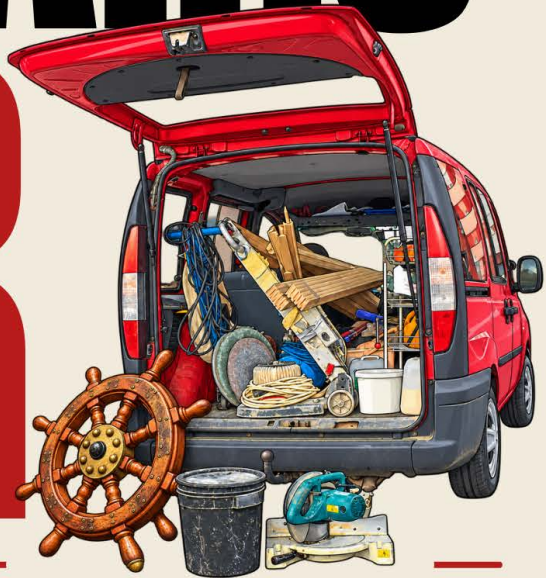


Book One

HOUSING REPAIRS ER



**SOCIAL HOUSING REPAIRS
HAS MORE CAPACITY
THAN YOU THINK.**



One council proved it.

Stuart Corrigan & Neil Alexander

Foreword by Ian Wright,
CEO of the Disruptive Innovators Network



Housing Repairs ER

Social Housing Repairs Has More Capacity Than
You Think

Stuart Corrigan, Neil Alexander

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Dedication

To John Seddon and John Little - two giants of organisational improvement who taught us to see what others overlooked.

Foreword

My own personal journey with systems thinking began at the end of the last century when I booked Prof. John Seddon, creator of the Vanguard Consulting to speak. This led to a relationship where we made several interventions with social landlords to understand the impact and value of a systems thinking approach and in fact ran a large scale trial funded by the government at the time. We learned a huge amount about what worked and more importantly where it didn't and why. But for one service area in particular the potential improvements were profound. This was in housing repairs which typically is an area of spend that is 10x more than just about any other budget.

I've lost count of the housing repairs conversations I've sat in. Board meetings, roundtables, conference panels, late-night chats. They all tend to go the same way. We need more operatives. We need a better contractor. We need a new system. And to be fair, the people saying these things work incredibly hard and care a great deal about their tenants.

So why is repairs still so hard?

My honest answer, after years of working with housing leaders through DIN, is that we keep trying to fix what we can see and not what's actually going on. We run our services off dashboards, targets and KPIs, and then we're surprised when a tenant tells us a repair took far too long even though

every box on our report is green (but often hiding red flags) The sector is spending record sums on existing homes. Awaab's Law has raised the stakes, and rightly so. The pressure to be seen to act has never been greater. That pressure, though, tends to push us towards bigger programmes, bigger budgets and bigger promises. It rarely pushes us towards understanding the work.

That's why I think this book matters. Stuart and Neil aren't handing you another model to roll out. They tell the story of a team that kept asking an annoying question: are we sure? Then they went and found out. They followed repairs from start to finish. They listened to calls. They watched operatives. They opened the back of a van and found six thousand pounds of stock, plus a ship's wheel. And the capacity shortage everyone was certain about started to disappear.

The systems view challenges much of what we treat as common sense in our sector. Cost, capacity and customer experience aren't three separate problems with three separate action plans. Very often they're the same problem showing up in three different places. That's uncomfortable to hear, because it means some of the solutions we're busy buying could already be sitting in our own organisations, lost in repeat visits, trips to the merchant, wrong diagnoses and tenants chasing us.

This is what I hope leaders take from it. Before you recruit, procure or launch another transformation programme, go and look. Pick one repair and follow it all the way through, then do another. Be curious before you're certain, and resist the urge to blame anyone. You might find the authors were right, or you might find something quite different. Either way, you'll be making decisions based on what's really happening rather than what you assume is.

In DIN we talk a lot about disruption. Sometimes the most disruptive thing a leader can do is stop guessing. A leap of fact, not a leap of faith. I'd recommend this book to anyone with the power to make that leap.

Ian Wright

Founder and CEO,

Disruptive Innovators Network (DIN)

What if Housing has Capacity Already?

Introduction

In a car park in the council, a small team emptied a plumber's van.

Copper fittings. Valves. Seventeen rolls of PTFE tape. Things he used every day. Things he'd forgotten he owned. By the time they stopped, more than £6,000 of stock was laid out on the tarmac.

Then they reached the back. And found a ship's wheel.

An actual ship's wheel.

They were there because the city didn't have enough plumbers. Too much work, not enough people. Everybody knew the answer. Hire more.

Nobody was hired. And some time later, the city had a different problem. Some days its plumbers had nothing to do. So it sat them in the call centre.

This is the story of how that happened. Of what a ship's wheel has to do with a £10 billion repairs bill. And of John Little, a man who kept asking the most irritating question in housing: *Are we sure?*

The council thought it had a capacity problem. So does most of housing today.

Most of housing believes what the council believed.

There aren't enough operatives. There aren't enough of the right skills. Contractors are stretched. Demand keeps coming.

And Awaab's Law has made getting repairs right, and getting them right quickly, considerably more important.

And capacity rarely arrives alone. It brings two friends.

The first is the tenant.

On paper, things look fine. The median landlord completes 94.9% of emergency repairs within its own target. But only 69.5% of tenants are satisfied with how long their repair took.

The organisation says: we did it on time.

The tenant says: it took too long.

Both can apparently be true.

The second is money.

Housing associations in England spent a record £10 billion on existing homes in 2024/25, 42% more in real terms than in 2020. And government has committed £39 billion to building more homes, which eventually means more homes to repair.

Cost.

Capacity.

Customer experience.

Three problems. Three sets of meetings. Three dashboards. Three people trying to fix them.

Unless they're not three problems.

What if they're three symptoms of the same one? What if the capacity is already there, just leaking out of the system in places nobody is looking? A second visit here. A trip to the merchant there. A wrong diagnosis. A missing part. A tenant chasing.

Every leak costs money. Every leak makes a tenant wait. And every leak makes it look like you need more people.

That's what the council discovered when it opened the van. And it's why this book asks a question most of housing hasn't yet thought to ask.

What if housing has the capacity already?

They found it in seven places.

1. Demand Leak
2. Materials Leak
3. Completion Leak
4. Schedule Leak
5. Ownership Leak
6. Diagnosis Leak
7. Measurement Leak

None of them appears on most dashboards. All of them cost money, make tenants wait, and make it look as though you need more people.

Each chapter that follows finds one or two of them the way the council did: by going to look.

By the end, you'll know where to look in your own service. And roughly how much you might find.

That's what this book is about. And the timing is interesting.

John Little's contribution to this story isn't that he arrived knowing all the answers. Quite the opposite. His peculiar habit was refusing to accept an answer until somebody had gone and looked.

Need more plumbers? Let's find out.

Operatives aren't productive enough? Let's find out.

Customers can't possibly choose when they want a repair? Let's find out.

The stock on the vans must be about right? Let's find out.

Again and again, John replaced an assumption with an investigation.

One of the people doing that investigating alongside him was Neil Alexander, co-author of this book. Neil had recently arrived in housing from retail. Some of John's ideas sounded ridiculously simple to him. A few sounded simply ridiculous. Then they started testing them. They followed operatives. Listened to calls. Studied demand. Looked at scheduling. And eventually opened the back of a plumber's van.

Inside were things he needed. Things he didn't need. Things he'd forgotten he owned. And a ship's wheel. An actual ship's wheel. It turned out to be quite a useful clue. Because the council didn't really have the problem

everybody thought it had. And once John and the team started following the evidence, something even stranger happened.

The shortage of plumbers began to disappear. Eventually, there were occasions when plumbers had nothing to do. So they put them in the call centre. Which sounds like an excellent way to run a plumbing business into the ground. It wasn't.

This is the story of why. And of the man who kept asking the question that made everything else possible.

Are we sure? Let's find out.

Chapter 1

It Seemed Like a Capacity Problem

The Demand Leak

In 2009, Neil Alexander knew almost nothing about housing repairs. This was useful. He'd come from retail, where people walked into shops, bought things and left. Housing repairs appeared to work differently.

A customer reported something.

Several people became involved.

A van went somewhere.

A part went somewhere else.

A computer generated things.

And eventually, hopefully, somebody fixed something.

Neil had barely arrived when he became involved in an intervention at the City Council. The problem looked obvious. Too much work. Not enough people. Some operatives appeared to be completing only a handful of jobs each day. Customers were waiting. Everyone knew what you do when there is more work than people. Get more people.

John Little had another idea. Don't. At least not yet. John wasn't arguing that the council had enough people. He was making a more irritating point. How could they possibly know? Before deciding they needed more capacity, they needed to understand what happened to the capacity they already had. Study it first. That became the pattern.

Somebody would produce an explanation. John would turn it back into a question. Then the team would go and look.

When Would You Like Us to Come?

One of John's ideas sounded particularly daft.

Ask the tenant when they'd like the repair done. Then go then. Neil remembers thinking something along the lines of: If it's that bloody easy, why isn't everybody doing it?

There were approximately 400 reasons why it couldn't work.

What if you didn't have the part?

What if the previous job overran?

What if everyone wanted Tuesday?

What if you didn't have enough plumbers?

What if the plumber was south and the customer was somewhere else?

Housing repairs was complicated. John's answer to most of this was irritatingly simple. Let's find out.

So they studied demand. How many calls? When? For what? What trade? Something unexpected appeared. Demand wasn't chaos. It had patterns. Mondays weren't Tuesdays. Mornings weren't afternoons. Plumbing demand wasn't electrical demand. There were peaks and troughs. If you

understood them, perhaps you could put capacity where demand was going to be.

Excellent. Except there still didn't appear to be enough capacity. Back to the original problem. More plumbers. Except John wasn't finished.

Where Do Plumbers Go?

If the plumbers were so busy, what were they actually doing all day?

It's the sort of question that sounds almost childish. Which is probably why organisations don't ask it often enough. The computer knew how many jobs had been allocated. Management knew how many operatives were employed. Everybody knew roughly how many repairs were being completed. John wanted to know what happened between those things. So the team followed the work.

And found some plumbers in builders' merchants. Quite a lot. An operative would arrive at a home, discover he didn't have something, get back in the van and go shopping. Drive. Park. Find the part. Queue. Back in the van. Back to the customer. Carry on.

Neil remembers many occasions when four hours of a working day could disappear around merchant visits.



Materials everywhere. The question is not how much stock you have, but whether the right material is available when the repair needs it.

Suddenly three jobs a day didn't look like a plumber working too slowly. It looked like a plumber who wasn't being allowed to plumb. That's quite a different problem. You can recruit another plumber. But if you put him into exactly the same system, you've simply recruited another person to drive to the merchant. The evidence had changed the question.

Why were they going?

Because they didn't have the parts.

Fine. Why didn't they have the parts?

That was more interesting.

Open the Van

The vans certainly weren't empty.

So John and the team did what they were becoming rather good at doing. They went to look. They picked an operative completing relatively few jobs and brought his van into a car park. They opened the doors. Then started

taking things out. And kept taking things out. Even the plumber found things he'd forgotten about. Things he used. Things he didn't. Things he hardly ever used. Missing things he apparently did. By the time they had finished, they had taken more than £6,000 of stock out of the van.



The back of a repairs van: plenty of stock, but not necessarily the stock the work requires.

This makes perfect sense if you're the plumber.

Run out of something once and you remember the pain. So next time, take two. Better make it three. Something left over from another job? Might come in handy. Put it in the van. Nobody had designed the stock. It had accumulated. The van was less an inventory system than a mobile insurance policy against uncertainty.

Then they reached the back and found a ship's wheel.

Neil insists this really happened. It had apparently come out of a void property. The plumber thought it might be useful one day. You never know. They had begun the investigation looking for missing plumbers.

John had sent them looking for facts. They found a ship's wheel. This was progress.

Because now they had a better question. How do we know what should actually be in this van? The answer wouldn't come from another opinion. They had enough of those.

It would come from the work.

Chapter 2

The Ship's Wheel

The Materials Leak

Ask a plumber what he needs in his van and there's a reasonable chance he'll know. There's also a reasonable chance he'll be wrong. Not because he doesn't understand plumbing. Because he's human.

John's instinct throughout the intervention was to distinguish what people believed from what the work could tell them. The van gave the team a perfect opportunity. They had what the plumber thought he needed. And they had what he'd actually been using.

So they compared them. The results were entertaining. Take PTFE tape. Neil remembers finding 17 rolls in one van. The data suggested the operative needed considerably fewer. Seventeen rolls sounds absurd until you imagine being the person standing underneath somebody's leaking sink without any. PTFE tape is cheap. A wasted journey isn't. So the plumber protects himself.

That is what people do when systems are unreliable. They create buffers.

Extra time.

Extra stock.

Extra emails.

Extra everything.

Extra spreadsheets.

The team suggested reducing the number. The plumber was not immediately overcome with enthusiasm. The easiest thing would have been to impose a new standard. John preferred the experiment. Reduce it. Watch what happens. Then come back to the argument with evidence.

A leap of fact rather than a leap of faith.

Neil even offered a rather unusual guarantee: if the plumber ran out because they had reduced the stock, Neil would personally deliver the missing item to the job. Naked. The next day the plumber quietly ordered enough PTFE tape to take himself back to seventeen rolls. Then guilt got the better of him. He came to the office, confessed, and handed the extras back.

"I Never Use Those"

Then they'd hold something up.

How often do you use this? Hardly ever. The records suggested otherwise. Another item. Use these all the time. Apparently not. Memory does this. We remember the spectacular shortage. We don't remember the 46 perfectly ordinary Tuesdays when nothing happened. So the council stopped trying to stock vans from memory. They looked at the rate of pull. What actually gets used? How often? In what quantity? How predictable is it? There was nothing glamorous about this.

Spreadsheets. Pivot tables. Control charts. Lots of control charts. Hundreds, Neil remembers. Item after item. It was laborious. But something important was happening. The team wasn't being asked to believe John. John was asking them to believe what they could see.

Opinion was slowly being replaced by knowledge.

One Size Fits Nobody

Having worked out what the first plumber appeared to need, the obvious next move was to give every plumber the same stock. Lovely. Standardisation. Problem solved. Then they looked at plumber number two. Different. Different work. Different skills. Different properties. Different patterns. The standard van lasted roughly as long as many standard solutions do when they meet the real world.

Again, the work had spoiled a perfectly good management idea. This became important in the work Neil later developed through Stock Right Now. The method should be standard. The answer doesn't have to be. Study this operative's demand. Understand this operative's rate of pull. Put the right things in this operative's van. Then keep watching.

And Then Something Odd Happened

The vans got better. Merchant journeys reduced.

Neil noticed it somewhere unexpected. He went to the mobile café at the builders' merchant and found none of their operatives there. He asked how business was. "Terrible," came the reply. "I don't know what's happened, but if it carries on I'll have to move elsewhere." A month later, the café

was gone. Operatives were spending more time in homes doing the thing everybody was paying them to do. Repairing them. Neil remembers some of the improvements being dramatic. In some cases, completed jobs appeared to more than double. Nobody worked twice as hard. There were no motivational posters. Nobody was told to give 110%. They just stopped spending so much time doing things that weren't repairs.

This was awkward. Because the problem had supposedly been a shortage of capacity. Now the same people were producing considerably more of it. John's original question had turned out to matter. Before buying more capacity, shouldn't we find out what happens to the capacity we've already bought? Some of it, they now knew, had been driving around the city looking for parts. Counterintuitively, van stock values fell by more than 50%. With roughly half the stock, operatives were completing two or three times as many jobs.

And the ship's wheel? Funny, certainly. But also instructive. The question isn't: How much stuff can we get in a van? It's: Will the thing needed to complete the repair be available when the operative needs it? Which leads to an obvious problem. No van can carry everything. Eventually something will be missing. So what then?

Easy. The plumber goes and gets it. Except the team had just spent weeks discovering why that was such a bad idea. John's method had produced another inconvenient fact. So they needed another rule.

Don't leave the house.

Chapter 3

Don't Leave the House

The Completion Leak

You cannot fit a builders' merchant into a Transit.

Sooner or later, something will be missing. An unusual fitting. A particular valve. Something nobody could reasonably have predicted. The normal response is perfectly sensible. Go and get it. Except the moment the plumber drives away, something important happens. Plumbing stops. This was exactly the sort of thing John kept forcing the team to see.

The organisation saw a perfectly normal materials collection. The customer saw their plumber leave. Those are different things.

That was the third leak. The Completion Leak.

Not the plumber who never turned up. The plumber who turned up, started, and couldn't finish. The repair was in progress. Then it wasn't.

From the inside, it barely registers. The operative is still working. The job is still open. It will probably be finished today. From the tenant's sofa, it looks rather different. Somebody came. Somebody left. Nobody's quite sure when they're coming back.

So the council tried reversing the journey. Instead of sending the plumber to the part, send the part to the plumber.

Blue Light

The team had access to a small distribution operation.

If the operative needed something, he contacted them. If they had it, it could be taken out. If they didn't, somebody could source it and get it to him. Neil remembers the delivery vehicles acquiring a nickname. The blue light vans. No blue lights were involved. The principle was more interesting than the nickname.

Protect the scarce thing.

Suppose a skilled plumber discovers he's missing a relatively inexpensive part.

One option is to send the skilled plumber on a shopping trip. Drive. Park. Find it. Queue. Drive back. Or somebody else can bring it to him. We routinely look at the price of the part. John's challenge was to look at what obtaining the part did to the whole repair. Especially the bit the customer cared about.

Getting it finished.

Won't the Plumber Just Stand There?

Good question. Sometimes that was a risk. But often there was other useful work to do.

So Neil remembers operatives telling the support team two things. What do I need? How long have I got before I need it? That's a much more interesting logistics problem. Not: How fast can you deliver a part? But: Can you get it here before the plumber runs out of useful work? The supply system now had to fit around the repair.

Not the other way round.

Yes, But What About a Door?

Small parts are easy.

What about an internal door? Bath panels? Big, awkward things? You can't carry those around. Maybe. John's response to objections like this was to turn them into things that could be studied. How often do you use one? If demand is predictable, perhaps carrying one isn't ridiculous. Perhaps the van needs changing. Perhaps it needs protecting. Perhaps having one buys enough time for somebody to bring the next one.

The interesting question wasn't: Why can't we? It was: What would need to be true?

Did You Fix It?

The council adopted a deliberately unforgiving view of failure.

Neil remembers that if an operative had to leave the property for a part, the team wanted to see it. Even if he came back later. Even if the repair was completed that day. Why? Because something in the system hadn't worked. Another organisation could quite legitimately define its measures differently.

But John wasn't interested in a measure because it made the service look good. He wanted measures that helped people understand what was happening. The tenant had watched the operative leave. The repair had stopped. That was useful information.

Which raises an interesting question about first time fix. What exactly does first time mean? First appointment? First day? Same job number? Operative never leaves? Customer's problem resolved? There isn't much point arguing about the percentage until we know what the percentage means.

A measure should help you learn. Otherwise it's decoration.

The £10 Part

This also changes how you think about cost.

Housing repairs is normally split into manageable pieces.

Labour.

Delivery.

Vehicles.

Materials.

Warehouse.

Procurement.

Each gets a budget. Each gets a manager. Each gets measures. Then somebody makes a perfectly sensible decision to save money in one of them. The repair becomes more expensive. Because the tenant doesn't consume any of those departments.

They consume the repair. Did you fix it? That's the interesting unit. This was perhaps the most important shift John was encouraging. Stop looking at the fragments.

Follow the whole thing from the customer's point of view.

The purpose of stock therefore isn't to have less stock.

Or more stock. Or full vans. It's to make what is required to complete the repair available when it is required. Sometimes on the van. Sometimes delivered. Sometimes sourced elsewhere.

Finish the job.

Two Ways to Stop a Repair

So far, everything stopping the plumber finishing had been physical.

A missing valve. A door that wouldn't fit in the van. A part sitting in a merchant across town.

Fix that and the repair gets finished. Mostly.

Because there's a second way to stop a repair, and it doesn't involve leaving the house at all. The operative is standing in the kitchen. He knows what's wrong. He's got what he needs on the van. And he does something else. A smaller job. A temporary job. The job on the sheet.

Not because he can't fix it. Because he isn't allowed to.

The repair doesn't stop with a van driving away. It stops with a job being closed. It looks like a completion. It's actually an appointment for next month.

Later in this book, you'll meet a plumber who had exactly this problem. He had the part on his van and still couldn't fit it. It cost his landlord £700.

So the Completion Leak has two sides. Does the operative have what the repair needs? And is the operative allowed to do what the tenant needs even if they don't know it yet?

The council had started with the first question. It's the easier one. You can see a missing part. You can't see a rule.

Except materials weren't the only thing stopping repairs being finished. You could have the perfect van and still send the wrong person. Or the right person at the wrong time. Or somebody without the right skill. Or give them so many jobs that they start the day already behind. The council had tackled the van. John now turned attention to the diary.

Their solution was equally sophisticated. One job.

Chapter 4

One Job at a Time

The Schedule & Ownership Leaks

Imagine being given fifteen jobs in the morning when experience tells you you'll finish three.

Welcome to Tuesday. The computer is delighted. The diary is full. Management can see that every available slot has been allocated. The operative sees twelve future disappointments. People respond to that. They rush. They make choices. They think about job seven while standing in job two. Jobs overrun. Plans collapse. Work gets moved. Then management looks at the resulting mess and concludes that scheduling needs to become even more sophisticated.

John looked at the same problem and asked something more basic. Why are we giving them all those jobs? The council went the other way.

Give the operative one.

Just One

Go there. Deal with it. When you're finished, we'll give you another.

Initially, Neil remembers much of this being managed visually, using flip charts on a wall. Jobs. Operatives. Locations. Skills. Customer commitments. When somebody became free, choose the next sensible job based on what was actually happening. This is a surprisingly radical idea. Most schedules are predictions about the future. At 2.17 next Thursday, Dave will finish Mrs Smith's tap and drive eleven minutes to Mr Jones's boiler.

Then Mrs Smith opens the door and says: "While you're here..."

Reality has entered the building. John's approach was not to become better at predicting reality. It was to design a system capable of responding to it. The diary had to cope with reality.

Not the other way round.

Pick a Time

Now John's earlier idea started looking slightly less mad.

Ask the tenant when they want you to come. Neil remembers customers being surprised. They were used to: Tuesday morning. Thursday afternoon. Eight until one. Instead: "When would you like us?" The point wasn't that the council could bend space and time. Things still went wrong. Jobs overran.

But the customer's requirement became the place to start.

Not the final inconvenience to squeeze into whatever capacity remained.

And this only worked because the team had changed the system underneath it. Better diagnosis. Better stock. Fewer merchant trips. More available capacity. The apparently silly question John had asked near the beginning was becoming possible because the team had followed all the other questions it created.

You cannot create customer choice by adding a button to a booking screen. The operating system has to be capable of delivering it.

Send the Right Human

One job at a time also changed allocation.

Who gets the next repair? The closest person? Maybe. But what if somebody ten minutes further away has exactly the right skill? Who has dealt with this before? Where is everybody now? What did we promise the tenant? What does this repair actually need?

The purpose isn't to produce the most beautiful schedule, but to finish the repair.

This is Mine

Continuity mattered, where practical.

Neil remembers trying to keep the person who understood the problem connected to it. Otherwise something familiar happens. One operative diagnoses. A part gets ordered. Someone else returns. They look at the part. Then at the repair. Then back at the part. You can imagine the sentence. "Why did he order that?" Now everybody gets another go.

The customer included. Ownership removes some of this. This is mine until it's finished.

Simple and surprisingly rare.

Congratulations. You're Now the Project Manager

When nobody inside owns the whole repair, somebody still has to.

Frequently that's the tenant. They remember what the first operative said. They explain it to the second. They chase the part. They phone for the appointment. They repeat the story. They chase again. Inside the organisation everything can look remarkably productive. Call answered. Appointment booked. Operative attended. Part ordered. Second appointment created. Five successful transactions. One broken boiler. This is the peculiar magic of fragmented organisations.

Every part can be busy while the customer gets nowhere. It was exactly why John kept dragging the team's attention back to the whole repair. The organisation had departments. The customer had a problem.

Those are not the same thing.

Busy Doing What?

One job at a time creates an uncomfortable possibility.

An operative might occasionally have nothing immediately waiting. Terrifying. Surely that's inefficient? Only if the purpose is to keep operatives busy. If the purpose is to complete repairs, the calculation changes. Because unfinished work comes back wearing different clothes. A repeat visit. A phone call. A chase. A complaint. Another appointment.

The attempt to keep everyone constantly busy can manufacture more work for everyone.

The council started removing some of that work.

Merchant journeys fell. Diagnosis improved. More jobs got finished. And then the whole experiment developed a problem. A rather embarrassing one. Remember the assumption John had refused to accept at the beginning? Not enough plumbers.

Now, occasionally, the plumbers were waiting for work.

Chapter 5

Too Many Plumbers

The Diagnosis Leak

Nobody had recruited any extra plumbers.

Nobody had cloned one.

Nobody had discovered a secret reserve of plumbers underneath the city.

These were the same people. But now, occasionally, there wasn't a plumbing job waiting. John's irritating question had produced an irritating answer. Before asking how to get more capacity, find out what you're doing with the capacity you've got.

Now they knew. And having released some of it, they faced another fascinating management dilemma. What do you do with an expensive skilled tradesperson who has nothing immediately to repair?

The council found an answer. Give him a chair.

The Plumber Will See You Now

Neil remembers spare trade capacity sometimes appearing in the contact centre. Which looks insane.

Plumbers are supposed to be under sinks. Contact centre staff are supposed to be wearing headsets. We have departments for a reason. Except John and the team were interested in the repair, not preserving the purity of the organisational chart. And the front end of the repair had a problem.

Diagnosis.

A customer says water is coming through the ceiling.

A roofer?

A plumber?

What do you send?

What information would help you know?

The person answering the phone might know the customer system backwards. The plumber knows water. Sit them beside each other and something useful happens. The plumber doesn't repair a tap.

He helps stop the wrong person being sent to one.

Get It Wrong Early

A bad diagnosis is remarkably productive.

It can generate: the wrong trade, the wrong materials, the wrong appointment, another visit, another call, another wait. One mistake at the beginning can keep an organisation busy for days. This is why putting a

plumber in a call centre might be more productive than sending him to another plumbing job.

He can prevent several future jobs from existing. And the knowledge spreads.

The person answering calls gets better at recognising what matters. Better diagnosis means the right person is more likely to arrive. That person is more likely to finish. More capacity appears. The circle turns again.

The more the team studied the work, the less ridiculous some of John's apparently ridiculous ideas became.

What Else Can You Do?

Released capacity created other possibilities.

Different operatives had different skills. Pair them. Teach each other. Close the gaps. Suddenly more people can deal with more types of demand. That makes allocation easier. It improves the chances of completing the repair. Which creates more capacity. Some work previously sent outside might now come back in. Again, nobody has worked faster.

The organisation has simply stopped paying quite so many people to deal with consequences it created itself.

"While I'm Here'

Then came perhaps the most dangerous question in modern management.

You've finished the job. The dashboard wants you gone. The tenant is standing there. Ask: "While I'm here, is there anything else?" No. Absolutely not. Think of the utilisation figures. Except perhaps there's another small repair. Perhaps something they've been meaning to report. Perhaps the operative notices something the tenant hasn't mentioned: another dripping tap, or a loose socket that needs screwing back to the wall. Perhaps five minutes now prevents a phone call, an appointment, a journey, another operative, another interruption to the tenant's day.

We call this next issue anticipation.

Solve tomorrow's demand today.

It's particularly powerful in housing because this isn't a parcel or a bank transaction. You're standing in somebody's home. You can see things the CRM cannot. Sometimes the most productive thing an operative can do is spend another five minutes there. It was another example of the distinction John kept making.

Don't manage the activity. Understand the purpose.

Where Did Plumbers Come From?

Now we can return to the mystery.

The council began with too much demand and too little capacity. Later, Neil remembers occasions when plumbers were available to do other

things. Where had they come from? The merchant. The second visit. The bad diagnosis. The missing part. The handover. The schedule. The unnecessary work. Nobody had discovered more capacity. They had stopped losing quite so much of it.

Which makes “How many people do we need?” a dangerous question to ask too early.

The answer depends on what you're going to make those people do.

Put ten plumbers into a system that wastes a chunk of their day and you'll soon be advertising for number eleven. John hadn't arrived with a clever formula for the correct number of plumbers. He'd done something more useful. He'd refused to believe the existing formula until they'd looked at the work.

The council began this journey more than fifteen years ago.

Today housing has technology the team could barely have imagined. Better scheduling. Better CRM. Better mobile technology. Better tracking. And private registered providers in England are spending £10 billion a year on existing homes. So here's the awkward question.

Why are we still talking about the same problems?

Chapter 6

97% on Time. 216 Days to Finish

The Measurement Leak

Why a repairs service reporting 97% performance couldn't tell whether it was fixing anybody's home.

Nobody deliberately designs a repairs service to be difficult. Quite the opposite. Most of the pieces make perfect sense. Specialise. Schedule people. Control stock. Procure cheaply. Set targets. Measure everything.

Perfectly sensible. Until you join the pieces together.

The tenant doesn't want a successful contact centre interaction. Followed by a successful appointment. Followed by a successful visit. Followed by a successful parts order. Followed by another successful appointment. They want the bloody leak fixed.

The organisation manages the pieces. The tenant experiences the whole.

Which brings us to the last leak. It's the hardest one to find, because it's hiding in the one place everybody trusts.

The reports.

John Little gave the managers a list of fifteen questions and told them he'd be back in an hour.

He wanted to know how many repairs were coming in. How many were completed properly the first time. How long tenants were actually waiting. How often operatives went back to the same problem. And how much of the work coming in was caused by something going wrong the first time.

The managers weren't worried. They had an excellent IT system. They told him so several times. The contractors had invested heavily in technology. Operatives carried handheld devices. Jobs were allocated electronically, appointments scheduled, completions recorded.

They had dashboards for almost everything.

John suspected they wouldn't find what he'd asked for.

He was right.

Not because the computers weren't working. They were working perfectly. They just weren't collecting anything John wanted to know.

The organisation could tell him how many jobs it had completed within target. It couldn't tell him how long it took to solve a tenant's problem.

Which was unfortunate. Solving the tenant's problem was rather the point.

On Paper, Very Little Was Wrong

The management reports were impressive. 98% of emergency repairs within target. 97% of urgent repairs. 97% of routine repairs.

John asked a different question. From the moment a tenant first reported a problem, how long until it was actually fixed?

Nobody knew. So the team went and found out. They rebuilt the histories of 560 repairs, one at a time.

The average was 216 days.

The upper control limit was around 1,081 days. Some cases ran to roughly 2,000.

Years.

And these weren't major building projects. They were ordinary repairs. A leaking bay window that had generated 24 visits. A kitchen problem with 26. A bathroom with 17.

Same property. Same problem. Again and again.

And every month, the report said 97%.

And this wasn't one unusual landlord. Across England, the median landlord reports completing 94.9% of emergency repairs and 82.5% of non-emergency repairs within its own target. Ask the tenants, and only 69.5% are satisfied with how long their repair took.

Neither number has to be wrong. They're answering different questions. The organisation measures whether it hit its target. The tenant judges what happened to them.

So how can both be true?

Because the organisation wasn't measuring problems. It was measuring jobs. An operative could attend, do the specified task and close the job. If the problem was still there, a new job was raised. That one could be completed within target too.

Every job was a success.

The repair was a failure.

The numbers weren't wrong. They were answering the wrong question.

The £700 Dripping Tap

One morning, John went out with a plumber.

The job looked simple. A dripping kitchen tap. The handheld device said: replace the washer.

Walking up to the front door, the plumber told John he already knew what they'd find. He'd been here before.

Inside, the tap was dripping exactly as promised.

John asked what the plumber thought it needed.

The tap was worn out, he said. Another washer would stop the drip for a while. It wouldn't fix it. Both taps were the same age and in the same condition. The sensible repair was to replace them.

Did he have taps on the van?

He did.

So why not fit them?

Because the device said washer. The washer was the authorised job. Fitting taps meant doing something the system hadn't specified. His supervisor was responsible for the performance figures. The contractor was paid against a schedule of rates. Doing something different raised awkward questions about payment and compliance.

John offered to authorise the taps.

The plumber declined.

John arranged for a senior housing manager to authorise it directly.

The plumber was still reluctant.

This was not a man who didn't know how to fix a tap. He knew exactly what was wrong. He had the parts. He was standing in front of the problem.

But the organisation had made following the instruction safer than fixing the tap.

Eventually, he was persuaded. New taps went in.

Then John went back to the records. How many times had they been to this property for this problem?

Ten.

Ten visits in two years, at around £70 each.

£700 spent on a dripping tap. A new set of taps cost about £60.

It was an expensive way to avoid spending £60.

And the £700 wasn't the whole bill. Every visit needed an appointment, a journey, an operative and somebody in an office. The tenant put up with ten interruptions. And for ten visits, that plumber wasn't fixing anybody else's home.

All of it consumed capacity. None of it fixed the tap.

What the Computer Couldn't See

The computer could raise a job, allocate it, track the appointment, record completion, check the target and approve the payment.

What it couldn't see was a tenant living with the same drip for two years.

To the organisation, ten jobs.

To the tenant, one repair that never got finished.

That's the difference between measuring activity and measuring what the service can actually deliver. We call the second kind *capability* measures. The idea is simple. Start with the purpose of the service, then measure how well you achieve it.

The purpose of a repairs service is to put the tenant's home right, properly, with as little unnecessary effort as possible.

So measure that. How often repairs are genuinely fixed on the first visit. How long they take from first report to fixed. How often tenants have to call again. How often operatives go back to the same problem. How much

time is lost to wrong diagnoses, missing parts, and operatives who aren't allowed to make the right call.

A target tells you whether somebody complied. A capability measure tells you whether the service works.

Useful information, both. Not the same information.

Ten jobs completed. One tap still dripping.

Why the Plumber Wouldn't Change the Taps

It would be easy to blame the plumber. He knew what was needed. He had the parts. A senior manager had said yes.

Why not just get on with it?

Because he understood the organisation better than anybody in the room.

John would leave. The senior manager would go back to the office. And the plumber would still be working under the same rules, for the same supervisor, judged by the same measures.

The system rewarded doing the authorised job. It didn't reward fixing the tenant's problem.

Nobody designed it that way. Managers wanted consistency, so they standardised tasks. They wanted accountability, so they specified what operatives could do. They wanted to control cost, so they priced individual jobs. They wanted to know how the service was doing, so they counted jobs completed within target.

Each decision was sensible. Together, they built a system where doing the job you were given mattered more than doing the right repair.

The plumber wasn't being irrational. He was doing exactly what the system asked.

The system was producing exactly what it was designed to produce.

Just not what anybody wanted.

Change the Rules, Not the Targets

John didn't respond with a new target.

He changed how decisions were made.

One of the tools he introduced was called PLAN. Before an operative changed the repair, four questions:

Proportionate. Is the repair proportionate to the problem?

Legal. Does it meet the legal requirements?

Auditable. Can the operative explain and account for the decision?

Necessary. Is it necessary to fix the problem properly?

For the dripping tap: new taps. Four yeses.

The operative could keep the old parts as evidence if anybody asked. And supervisors stopped checking whether the instruction had been followed and started backing the operative's professional judgement.

But permission was only half of it.

You'll recognise this one. It's the Completion Leak from *Don't Leave the House*, seen from the other side. Then it was the plumber leaving to fetch a part. Here it's the plumber who has the part and isn't allowed to fit it.

Permission without parts doesn't fix the tap.

Parts without permission don't fix it either.

Put the two together and something different becomes possible. A tenant reports a problem. An operative arrives, works out what's needed and fixes it.

Once.

No second appointment. No new job to raise, schedule, monitor and pay for. No tenant wondering when somebody's coming back.

The Capacity Hiding in Plain Sight

The results were significant.

The saving wasn't just the gap between £700 of visits and £60 of taps. Every unnecessary visit had tied up an operative who could have been in somebody else's home. Every repeat job needed raising, scheduling and chasing. Every failed repair had created more work for a service that already believed it didn't have enough people.

Take that work away and the capacity comes back.

Sound familiar?

There were occasions when plumbers had no repairs waiting. And some of them ended up in the call centre, helping diagnose problems properly the first time a tenant rang.

The service hadn't fixed its shortage of plumbers by recruiting. It had stopped wasting the plumbers it already had.

None of which appeared in the original reports. They still said 97%.

The Tap in the £10 Billion

Private registered providers in England spent £10 billion on existing homes in 2024/25. £6.1 billion on repairs and maintenance. £3.9 billion on major repairs. Up 13% in a year. Up 42% in real terms since 2020. Current plans suggest an average of £10.9 billion a year for the next five years.

So here's an impolite question. How much of it buys failure? The second visit. The merchant journey. The wrong trade. The repeat diagnosis. The tenant chasing. The part that arrives after the person who knew why it was ordered has moved on to another job.

There's no line in the accounts called MONEY WE SPENT BECAUSE THE SYSTEM MADE IT HARD TO FIX THE TAP. It's just called cost.

But somewhere in that £10 billion is a dripping tap. Probably several thousand of them. Each one completed on time, every time.

John's lesson wasn't that all of this spending is waste. It was more dangerous than that. Don't assume you know. Go and find out.

The Law That Starts the Clock

In December 2020, a two-year-old boy called Awaab Ishak died in Rochdale. A coroner found that his death was caused by prolonged exposure to mould in the flat his family rented from their housing association. The family had complained about it.

The law that now carries his name asks a different question from the one most repairs reports answer. It doesn't ask whether the job was completed within target. It asks how long the tenant has been living with the hazard.

Since October 2025, social landlords in England have had to:

- investigate emergency hazards and make them safe within **24 hours**
- investigate significant damp and mould hazards within **10 working days** of becoming aware of them
- give the tenant a written summary within **3 working days** of the investigation
- complete the work needed to make the home safe within **5 working days** of the investigation start any further work within **12 weeks**

If the home can't be made safe in time, the landlord must provide somewhere else to live, at its own expense.

From 30 November 2026, Phase 2 extends the same duties to excess cold and heat, falls, structural collapse and explosions, fire, electrical hazards, and hygiene and food safety.

And these aren't targets. They're written into the tenancy. Miss them and the tenant can take you to court.

Now remember the 216 days. The bay window with 24 visits. The tap with ten jobs, every one completed on time.

Awaab's Law doesn't start the clock when a job is raised and stop it when a job is closed. It starts when you become aware of the problem and stops when the home is safe. That's the end-to-end time. The number the managers couldn't produce.

Which means a landlord measuring jobs could report 97% and be breaking the law at the same time. And not know it.

It also means you need capacity you can actually call on. Twenty-four hours doesn't leave room for a plumber queuing at a merchant, a diary planned for fifteen jobs, or a roofer sent to a burst pipe. Every leak in this book eats into the time the law allows.

The obvious response is to recruit. Before you do, ask John's question.

Where is the capacity you've already bought?

Six Numbers Every Repairs Leader Should Know

John's fifteen questions are still a useful test. Ask your managers for the numbers that show what tenants actually experience. Not the monthly report. Not the percentage within target. What really happens.

Start with six. Each one points at a leak.

1. How many repairs are genuinely fixed first time? (*The Completion Leak*)

Not jobs closed after one visit. Problems fully resolved with nobody having to go back. You don't have to adopt anybody else's definition. But you should know what yours hides. Otherwise a measure can be perfectly accurate and practically useless.

2. How long do repairs really take? (*The Measurement Leak*)

From the tenant's first report to the problem actually fixed. Look at the spread, including the longest cases, not just the average. The average was 216 days. The long tail was years. This is also the clock Awaab's Law runs on.

3. How many come back? (*The Completion and Ownership Leaks*)

Repeat visits and jobs raised again for the same problem. How often are you paying to do work you've already attempted?

4. How much demand is coming in, and why? (*The Demand Leak*)

New problems, versus contacts caused by something that hasn't happened, hasn't worked or hasn't been explained.

5. How often is the first diagnosis wrong? (*The Diagnosis Leak*)

How often does an operative arrive to find a different problem from the one on the job sheet?

6. How much capacity goes on avoidable work? (*All of them*)

Time spent going back to failed repairs, fetching missing parts, redoing earlier work and attending jobs that didn't need a visit. Add it up and you have a rough answer to the question this book started with.

These aren't six new targets. They're six things to investigate.

Notice what isn't on the list. Which new system should we buy? How many more operatives should we recruit? How much more stock should

we hold? Those may turn out to be the answers. They shouldn't be the starting questions.

If first-time fix is low, the point isn't to find somebody to blame. It's to find out what's stopping operatives finishing.

If end-to-end times are long, the question isn't how to make people work faster. It's where the time goes.

If tenants keep calling, the question isn't how to answer faster. It's why they need to call at all.

And if your organisation can't answer these six questions in an hour, that tells you something too. About what it has chosen to count.

Are We Measuring Whether We Fixed It?

The managers had invested heavily in technology. They could allocate, record, monitor and report.

Across housing, that's now normal. Scheduling systems optimise routes. Operatives carry smartphones. Tenants get text messages. Managers have dashboards that would have looked like NASA mission control in 2009.

And still: missing parts, repeat visits, chasing, handoffs, unhappy tenants. Technology clearly matters. It just wasn't the missing ingredient.

When John asked what the service was achieving for tenants, the managers couldn't say.

The information that mattered most was the information they didn't have.

Once they collected it, they found repairs taking years, homes visited over and over, skilled operatives stopped from making sensible decisions, and money spent finishing jobs that didn't fix anything.

None of it could be solved by asking people to work harder. All of it needed managers to understand why the system behaved the way it did.

So perhaps the most useful question for a housing leader isn't "Are we meeting our targets?"

It's a simpler one.

Are we measuring whether we fixed the problem?

That was the seventh leak. The Measurement Leak. The one that hides all the others.

LEAKS FOUND: 7.

PLUMBERS RECRUITED: 0.

Which leaves one question. Where do you start?

Chapter 7

Don't Transform Repairs

Where to Start

There is a fairly reliable way to make improving a repairs service difficult. Call it a transformation.

The moment you do, everything gets bigger. You need a programme. A programme needs a board. The board needs a plan. The plan needs workstreams. The workstreams need milestones. Somebody suggests a new IT system. Somebody else starts drawing the future operating model. Consultants arrive. PowerPoint multiplies. And eighteen months later, an operative is still standing outside a tenant's home without the part he needs to fix the tap.

John Little did things differently. He went and had a look. Not once. Continually. And buried inside that apparently unremarkable habit is perhaps the most important lesson in this book. Because if you want to transform a repairs service, you probably shouldn't start by trying to transform it. You should start by trying to understand it.

Go and Look

John had a rule. If you wanted to understand what was happening, go to where it was happening.

Follow the work. Watch the operatives. Look inside the vans. Follow repairs from the tenant reporting the problem until somebody actually fixes it. Study the journeys. Study the parts. Study the repeat visits. Study the calls tenants make when nothing appears to be happening. And, importantly, resist the temptation to explain what you find too quickly.

Most organisations see their repairs service through reports.

Jobs completed.

First-time fix.

Average days.

Appointments kept.

Productivity.

Emergency jobs.

Jobs within target.

Stock value.

Cost per repair.

Each measure tells you something. The danger comes when we convince ourselves that together they tell us how the system works.

They don't.

You can have a repair that is technically within target and a tenant who thinks the service has been appalling. You can have an operative who appears unproductive while spending half his day compensating for failures elsewhere. You can improve the utilisation of every individual resource

while making the end-to-end service worse. And you can have thousands of pounds of stock sitting in vans while the one part an operative needs is sitting in somebody else's.

The spreadsheet shows the numbers. The work shows you the system.

Follow a Repair, Not the Process Map

Pick a repair. Any repair. Start where the tenant started.

What did they ask for?

What happened next?

Who received it?

Who made a decision?

What information did they have?

Where did the job go?

Who scheduled it?

What did the operative know before arriving?

Did they have the right skills?

Did they have the right part?

Could they complete the job? If not, why not?

What happened next?

How many people touched the repair?

How many times did the tenant have to contact you?

How much elapsed time passed before the problem was actually gone?

Then do another. And another.

Patterns begin to appear remarkably quickly. Low first-time fix. Too many appointments. Poor productivity. High costs. Tenants chasing. Complaints. Backlogs. Overtime. Too many operatives. Not enough opera-

tives. These can look like separate management problems. They may be symptoms of the same system. Study first. Diagnose second. Change third. Never the other way around.

Find the Thing that is Stopping the Work

Most organisations contain hundreds of things that could be improved. The trick is not finding something to change. The trick is finding the thing that matters. Suppose first-time fix is poor. You could train operatives. Change the bonus scheme. Improve scheduling. Buy a new repairs platform. Reorganise the team. Introduce another KPI. Recruit more people. Or you could discover that operatives frequently do not have the materials required to complete the jobs they have been sent to.

If that is true, almost everything else is secondary. An operative cannot motivationally-speaker his way around not having a ball valve. The repair is not getting finished. John's work repeatedly came back to a simple question: What is preventing this system from doing more of what it exists to do? Not: What can we improve? Not: What does best practice say? Not: What technology are other landlords buying? What is stopping the work?

Do Less

This was one of the lessons it took me longest to learn. Years ago, if I studied an organisation and found the system was badly designed, I wanted to redesign the system. Perfectly logical. Also frequently a terrible idea. From my side of the table, the evidence was overwhelming. From the other side, somebody was hearing: rip apart the organisation, change people's roles, change the measures, change management behaviour, change the

technology, abandon the system we spent £700,000 installing. Trust me. Oddly enough, they sometimes declined.

There is another way. Dr Alan Barnard, one of the world's leading thinkers on the Theory of Constraints, helped me see intervention differently. The question is not: How much can we change? It is: What is the smallest change capable of producing the largest improvement? Don't frighten the horses. If two changes can release significant capacity, make two changes. If one rule is creating enormous amounts of unnecessary work, change the rule. If getting the right stock into the right vans dramatically increases the number of repairs completed first time, start there.

Prove It

Don't ask people to believe you. Show them. Choose somewhere small enough to learn. A team. An area. A repair type. A handful of operatives. Understand their demand. Understand what they actually use. Understand the predictability in that usage. Put the right materials where they need to be. Change the rules that prevent completion. Then watch what happens.

Do operatives complete more repairs? Do they make fewer journeys to merchants? Do repeat visits fall? Does apparent capacity increase? Does the backlog move? Do tenants chase less? Does the cost of completing the work change? Now something important has happened. You are no longer having an argument about competing management philosophies. You have evidence. The conversation changes from "Will this work?" to "Why aren't we doing this everywhere?" That is not a leap of faith. It is a leap of fact.

Don't Start With Software

There is a peculiar habit in modern organisations. When we discover a badly performing system, we buy another system. Sometimes that is necessary. Often it simply allows us to perform the wrong work more efficiently. Neil Alexander discovered something fascinating after years of working with organisations on materials. You might imagine that large repairs operations have sophisticated systems controlling van stock. Often they do not. There may be a repairs system. Scheduling software. An ordering facility bolted onto something else. Spreadsheets. But the mechanism for understanding what operatives actually consume, what each van should carry and how stock should replenish according to real demand can be surprisingly primitive.

That creates an opportunity. You do not necessarily have to begin by ripping out the organisation's technology. Understand the work first. Then use technology where it solves a problem you now understand. Method before technology. Always. A bad method digitised is still a bad method. It is just faster.

Don't Copy John

This may seem a strange thing to say in a book that has spent quite a lot of time telling you about him. But do not copy what John did. Copy how John thought. If you leave this book believing that every housing repairs service needs exactly the same stock system, the same number of parts, the same warehouse arrangement or the same operating model, we have failed. Your demand will be different. Your geography will be different. Your housing stock will be different. Your operatives will be different. Your suppliers will be different. Your tenants will be different.

The principles travel. The answers do not necessarily. Go and look. Understand demand. Follow the work. Find what prevents completion. Change something. See what happens. Learn. Then go and look again. Best practice asks: What did somebody else do? John's method asks: What does this system need?

Go Back

You made the change. It worked. Congratulations. Now go back. Look again. What has happened to demand? What has happened to completion? What are operatives doing now? Where is the work waiting? What are tenants calling about? What has become the new constraint? Systems move. Remove one problem and another becomes visible. Release capacity in one place and pressure may appear somewhere else. A rule that made sense six months ago may no longer make sense. The work teaches you what to do next.

Transformation is not an event. It is not the day the new system goes live. It is not the programme closure meeting. It is not the slide with all the green traffic lights. It is a repeated cycle of learning. Look. Understand. Change. Look again. Perhaps the best transformation programme John Little ever ran was not really a programme at all. It was a habit. He kept going back to look.

Your First Monday

If you are responsible for a housing repairs service and you have reached this point wondering where to begin, do not commission a transformation programme. Do not start writing the business case for a new repairs platform. And do not form a steering group. On Monday morning, choose

a small number of real repairs. Follow them from the moment the tenant contacted you until the moment the problem was actually solved.

Talk to the tenant. Sit with the people taking the calls. Follow the information. Go out with the operative. Look in the van. Go to the merchant if the operative goes to the merchant. Count the journeys. Count the handovers. Count the repeat visits. Notice the waiting. Ask why. Whenever somebody tells you, "That's just how the system works," get interested. You are not looking for somebody to blame. You are looking for the rules, assumptions and constraints that make perfectly sensible people do things that do not make much sense when you look at the whole.

Find one. Change it. See what happens. Then go back. Don't start by transforming repairs. Start by going to see one.

More than fifteen years ago, John Little looked at a repairs service that appeared to need more plumbers. He didn't offer them a grand theory. He asked them to find out. They followed the work. They challenged what everybody knew. They opened a van. And somewhere underneath all the things a plumber thought he might one day need, they found a ship's wheel.

That's why this story still matters. Not because they found the answer. Because John showed them how to find it. A leap of fact. Not a leap of faith.

A LEAP OF FACT. NOT A LEAP OF FAITH.

So What do We Do Next?

This book can show you where to look. It can show you why apparently separate problems - rising costs, poor first-time fix, frustrated tenants, backlogs, complaints and a lack of capacity - may actually be connected. And it can show you some of the principles we have used to tackle them. What it cannot tell you is what is happening inside your repairs service. For that, we need to have a look.

The place to start is not a transformation programme, a lengthy proposal or a sales pitch. It is a conversation. Tell us about the problems you are trying to solve. What is frustrating you? Where are costs rising? Where does capacity seem to disappear? What are tenants complaining about? What have you already tried?

We will listen. And we will have an open and honest conversation about whether what you have read in this book could help. If we think it can, we will explain where we would start. If we do not, we will tell you that too.

If you'd like to hire someone like John email me at stuart@descartesconsulting.co.uk and let's talk.

More repairs. Lower costs. Happier tenants. Scan below to see how.

Stuart Corrigan & Neil Alexander



About the Authors

Neil Alexander

Having spent more than 30 years dealing with all different types of stock and stock availability in retail, he knows the frustration for the customer when an item that's needed isn't there, and importantly the subsequent cost to both the customer and the business.

In 2009 with Portsmouth City Council in their repairs system, Neil's first taste of an intervention by Vanguard was born where he put the method into practice. He learned that repairs could be completed at the exact time a tenant requested, and importantly how to apply the methods to ensure the correct materials were always on the van to complete the right repair. Van stock values and overall costs fell through the floor, and morale and customer satisfaction went through the roof.

He now knows intimately and practically how to best apply the Vanguard method to achieve jaw dropping results in stock management.

After two years of intervening on his own system the intervention bug convinced him that he could help other like-minded organisations, and not just his own. He joined Vanguard on a similar intervention to replicate the successes he had in Portsmouth, with Incommunities Housing Associa-

tion in Bradford and then in Flagship Housing in East Anglia, as well as many private sector organisation

Following that in 2014 he created Stock Right Now which is a stock management software solution used in any organisation that want to gain visibility control and improvement of any organisation with a fleet of vans carrying out installation's repairs or maintenance

The software has been proven time and time again to significantly increase genuine first visit fix rate, whilst simultaneously and counterintuitively reducing stock held by over 50%.

Since then, the software is now used by many merchants, private and public sector organisations and is capable of ordering any part, from any supplier and any branch meaning only one app is needed rather than many.

Stuart Corrigan

Stuart Corrigan is the founder of Descartes Consulting and has spent nearly three decades helping organisations improve the way they work.

With a background in psychology, an MBA in Lean Thinking from Cardiff University, and extensive experience working alongside some of the UK's leading systems thinkers, Stuart brings a distinctive perspective to organisational performance.

His work spans social housing, insurance, pensions and public services, helping leaders understand why well-intentioned systems so often create unnecessary work, higher costs and frustrated customers.

He is the author of *Claims ER* and writes regularly about the psychology of service, organisational performance and the relationship between customer effort, loyalty and profit.

His guiding belief is simple: better service shouldn't require people to work harder. It should require less unnecessary work.