

Powerful Profitable Conversations in Action

Sector - Housing



To Undertake a 360 Feedback Exercise on Climate and Leadership Behaviour and then Design, Build and Implement a Leadership Development Programme for Top 30 Leaders.

The Current Situation

- A recent “Mock Inspection “within community care housing, was undertaken prior to an upcoming Audit Commission Inspection. This report highlighted many strengths within Supported Housing Whilst there were many strengths identified in the mock report this case study focuses on some of those areas where weakness were observed.
- Overall, the supported housing service was currently rated poor (0 star) due to a range of strategic and operational weaknesses.
- Some areas highlighted as weak included:
 - Staff insufficiently qualified - strategy required to get to level B accreditation.
 - Staff sickness levels are having a negative impact on the delivery of the services.
 - Industry standard of 98% of calls being answered in 60 seconds is not being achieved.
 - Insufficient monitoring of set targets for customer satisfaction.
 - Clarify role ambiguities between support workers and housing management staff - current situation is creating an incoherent approach to the management of the sheltered housing schemes.
- The mock inspection highlighted performance indicators and KLOE’s as being in the lower quartile.
- Following the mock report, the senior management team looked beyond structure and process and highlighted gaps in leadership capability which they believed were a contributing factor. They felt that there was a need to review the:
 - Capacity and capability amongst the leadership community.
 - For this process to identify leadership gaps and strengths.
- Concurrently, the business is rolling out a re-structure and the HR team are developing a framework of leadership behaviour.

The Challenges

- The 360 climate and leadership feedback exercise exposed a climate of bullying, fear, blame and helplessness amongst the leadership community.
- Undertaking developmental work with the top 3 layers of management in an organisation where ethical issues had been exposed, trust was low, yet there was some light at the end of the tunnel with the exit of the formal leader.
- How to create a “container” for trust within this group of leaders that would allow the experience they had been through and could finally share in an open way.
- Find a process and language through the training and development programme, they could use to name what happened, explore their role in what happened, what they missed and what they did or did not do that contributed to what happened and take meaning from it in relation to how they were going to lead in the future.
- Helping these leaders recognise through their own behavioural propensities how they could avoid getting into “stuck patterns” of conversation with each other and their own teams.
- Consider in our design of the leadership development intervention how we get to creating and aligned model of leadership for this organisation - what would it look like, the moral values a leader would possess, how this fits with their individual models of leadership and how would they know outstanding leadership of they saw it.
- Creating the mechanisms within the training intervention to allow this group of leaders to consciously articulate a Leadership Model by getting to know themselves, cultivate conversational skills acuity in the areas of soliciting feedback, tolerating difference, connecting with others, balancing ego and humility, responding under pressure, risk taking, and understanding the system in which they are leading.

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Making Sense of What We Saw

This assignment highlighted for us the fallout that happens in an organisation where the climate was unhealthy, morale and motivation was low and individual and aspects of operational performance were poor. The 360 feedback exercise exposed some perceived integrity issues particularly within the face to face structures. This affected the conversations in this organisation in the following ways:

- Conversations were of the monologue variety with the formal leader making all the decisions thereby creating a dynamic where it is was not ok to oppose or challenge the decision.
- Conversations lacked debate around critical issues making them one dimensional, thereby creating a culture of silence “in the room” and covert opposition “outside of the room).
- Courteous compliance became the norm amongst the majority of the leadership population - with conversations looking like gentle disagreements in hushed tones - where someone had the courage to disagree , they were ostracised or driven underground.
- There was evidence of “silencing the witnesses”.

Our response to this situation as interventionists was to “read the situation” and interpret and name what we were seeing using Kantor’s model of Structural Dynamics. By making sense of the feedback data, and helping the teams make sense of it from an individual and team perspective we helped them to see the dynamic they created as a collective. We also made connections with this data in the context of the operating environment of the organisation. We gave the leaders a language to describe the ways in which their culture supported/hindered their strategic goals.

Our solution was aimed at improving performance through demonstrating respect for people we were working with, creating a climate of trust in which to work, share the power in creating solutions and modelling a way of confronting issues in an honest and sensitive way. We emphasised that the quality of people processes such as Performance management; Coaching, Decision Making and Communication are only as good as the leadership behaviour and the quality of conversations. Over the course of 9 months we helped the leaders create a new healthy dynamic within the business where by it felt safer to speak openly and honestly and to work through differences. The modular leadership programme was underpinned by a Systems approach to leadership, starting with “own” system” as well as the wider organisational system allowing the leadership community to take personal responsibility for everything they said and did in the context of every conversation they had with peers, staff and stakeholders. The quality of these conversations significantly enhanced the success and implementation of the new Performance Development Process and Leadership competency framework.

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