

Positive Outcomes from Conflict

Improving capability to have productive workplace discussions

Synopsis

Faced with enormous external pressure to deliver a complex scientific programme on time, changes to structure and significant growth in the UK team, executive staff identified opportunities to improve the way they dealt with discussions about difficult issues in the workplace and team meetings.

Key Issues

> The leadership team identified an opportunity to improve the quality of their debate, which occasionally revealed deep disagreements or avoidance of the 'elephant in the room'. Unproductive behaviour tended to leave one or two team members with negative feelings about colleagues and low commitment to team decisions.

> A large operational team experienced significant issues with poor quality feedback in the workplace, resulting in dispute, a loss of trust and some fractured relationships. The HR Director invited us to deliver skills development as part of the overall management response.

The Solution

Leadership Team

> We integrated a 'productive conflict' workshop within a planned team offsite meeting to illustrate how conflict can be managed as a natural and productive part of working life. Our workshop used the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Indicator assessment to gain insight into team members' preferred conflict modes, help them understand and accept one another's preferences and to make positive changes to improve communication and team relationships.

Operations Team

> We designed a workshop on Giving and Receiving Effective Feedback intended to help all staff develop better skills for having 'difficult' conversations at work. The workshop was attended by over 80 people over several days. The content involved teaching and rehearsing skills at giving and receiving effective peer to peer feedback. We developed an added module for managers and supervisors responsible for giving performance feedback to staff.

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Case Study

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The Results

The leadership team reacted very positively by holding more productive meetings, achieving better clarity about decisions and stronger 'buy-in' to them. Team relationships remained healthy and productive after the workshop.

We evaluated the operations team workshop impact, asking questions about delivery quality, understanding of content and rating both relevance and ease of implementation.

Of participants, 100% strongly agreed that they would recommend the programme to others. The aspects of the programme most valued by participants were 'air-clearing' discussions about effective feedback and practical exercises to reinforce new skills and techniques. Ninety percent of managers indicated they had used the skills over the three months following the workshop.

This programme was one of several we ran with this company from formation, through integration, reorganisation and into maturity. We were delighted to hear that they finally received approval for this technically complex drug and delivery system from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in January 2019; the first generic product to receive approval in this class. Their hard work and determination potentially benefits more than 26 million people with a common disease at a 70% price reduction on the branded competitor product. We are honoured to have played a small role supporting their effectiveness.

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