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Leadership For All Masterclass: Noticing Change - Session Summary

The Leadership For All Masterclass, Noticing Change: In Yourself, In Your Team, In the Room, provided colleagues from across WUTH and WCHC with an opportunity to explore how people experience and respond to change.

Led by Mark Green, Strategic Advisor, Leadership and Team Effectiveness Specialist and Coach, the session combined practical theory, group discussion, personal reflection and interactive Menti exercises.

The emphasis throughout was not on trying to “fix” change or people’s responses to it, but on becoming better at noticing what may be happening within ourselves and those around us.



Change is individual

The session began by recognising that change is ever present, both within the workplace and in our lives more broadly.

Colleagues were asked to reflect on how they were currently feeling about change, with responses including uncertainty, anxiety and the unknown, alongside more positive feelings such as excitement and anticipation.

A key theme established early in the session was that there is no single “right” response to change. Two people experiencing the same change may respond very differently depending on what they value, what they need and how that change affects them personally.

When colleagues were asked to think about a change they had experienced and whether it had left them feeling comfortable, curious, cautious or stretched, responses demonstrated this variety, with caution emerging particularly strongly.

Understanding our response to change

Mark explored some of the neuroscience behind our reactions to change, including the relationship between the brain's prefrontal cortex, which supports rational thought and decision making, and the limbic system and amygdala, which are involved in our emotional responses to perceived threat and reward.

The session considered how quickly we can respond instinctively to something that feels threatening before we have had the opportunity to process it more rationally.

This provided the foundation for exploring five lenses which can help us understand why a particular change may affect us.

The five lenses

- **Status**

Status relates to how we believe we are seen and valued by others and our perceived position within a team or organisation. During change, questions about responsibilities, roles or how others perceive us can therefore have a significant impact.

- **Predictability**

People naturally look for a degree of certainty about what is happening and what will happen next. Change can challenge that predictability, particularly when the eventual outcome is not yet known.

The session highlighted that it may not always be possible to provide certainty about the final destination, but providing clarity about milestones, timescales and what will happen next can help people navigate uncertainty.

- **Autonomy**

Autonomy concerns the amount of choice, independence and control we feel we have over what happens to us and how we carry out our work.

Even when the overall direction of change cannot be altered, providing meaningful choices where possible can help people retain a sense of control.

- **Connection**

As social beings, feeling connected to colleagues and having a sense of belonging is important. Change can disrupt relationships, teams and established ways of working, making connection particularly important during periods of uncertainty.

- **Fairness**

Fairness relates to how decisions are made and whether people feel processes and outcomes are equitable. It does not necessarily mean treating everyone identically, but ensuring individual circumstances are considered and decisions can be understood.

The discussion also demonstrated that these lenses do not operate independently. A single issue can affect several at once. For example, a decision relating to pay could potentially

affect somebody's sense of status, fairness or predictability depending on their individual circumstances.

What colleagues told us

Interactive polling gave colleagues the opportunity to consider which of the five lenses were particularly relevant to them at the moment.

While responses varied, autonomy, connection and fairness featured particularly strongly, reinforcing the individual nature of people's experiences of change.

The exercise was designed as an opportunity for reflection rather than a diagnostic assessment, encouraging colleagues to recognise which areas may be particularly important to them and how that understanding could help them respond differently.

Psychological safety during change

The session then explored psychological safety and the importance of creating environments where colleagues feel able to say how they are doing, ask questions and raise concerns without fearing negative consequences.

Psychological safety was not presented as avoiding difficult conversations or making everything comfortable. Instead, the discussion focused on whether people feel safe enough to speak openly when something is affecting them.

Trust and relationships were highlighted as particularly important when conversations involve people's emotions or experiences of change.

Colleagues were encouraged to consider what they personally need in order to feel safe during periods of change and how teams and leaders can help create those conditions for others.

Noticing change in others

Having initially concentrated on recognising our own responses, the masterclass moved on to what we might notice in colleagues and teams.

Examples included people becoming quieter than usual, withdrawing, appearing more irritable, contributing less to conversations or attempting to hold more tightly to control.

Through Menti, colleagues shared some of the behaviours they had observed within their own teams and peer groups. Responses included isolation, frustration, stress, withdrawal, uncertainty, bickering and people being left out of conversations.

Connection emerged as a particularly noticeable theme.

The discussion emphasised that noticing a change in somebody's behaviour does not mean diagnosing what is happening or assuming that we know the cause.

Instead, Mark encouraged colleagues to seek to understand.

This means being curious about what may be happening for somebody, creating an opportunity for conversation and attempting to suspend our own assumptions and judgements. What is visible in someone's behaviour may represent only a small part of what they are experiencing.

Maintaining connection

Discussion also explored the way communication and working practices have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased remote and hybrid working.

Colleagues reflected on some of the challenges this can create when trying to notice how others are doing. Online communication can make it more difficult to pick up on body language and other signals that would be more apparent when working together in person.

The session highlighted the importance of being intentional about opportunities to connect, particularly for geographically dispersed or hybrid teams.

Rather than bringing people together simply for the sake of being together, teams were encouraged to think about where face-to-face interaction adds genuine value and to make the most of those opportunities.

This becomes particularly important when workloads are high. When people are under pressure, there can be a natural tendency to focus solely on tasks and delivery, making it easier to lose some of the everyday connections with colleagues.

Understanding the 'why'

Towards the end of the masterclass, colleagues reflected on the importance of understanding the reason behind change.

Having clarity about why something is changing and the shared purpose behind it can help people make sense of what is happening.

This can also influence several of the five lenses. Understanding why a decision has been made, for example, may help provide greater predictability or address concerns relating to autonomy or fairness.

The discussion acknowledged that organisational change is rarely a simple or linear process. Different people and different parts of an organisation may experience change at different times and in different ways.

Turning reflection into action

The final part of the session encouraged colleagues to consider what they could take away and put into practice.

Rather than attempting to address everything at once, colleagues were asked to identify one small thing they could try or focus on over the following week or two.

Reflections shared during the closing discussion included recognising when personal frustration with change may be affecting others, making greater use of connections and conversations, challenging a tendency to presume the worst and recognising the importance of clearly communicating the purpose behind change.

The overall message from the session was that we cannot always control change or remove uncertainty. We can, however, become more aware of our own response to it, recognise that others may experience the same situation very differently and be more intentional about how we connect with and support the people around us.

The five lenses of status, predictability, autonomy, connection and fairness provide a practical framework for continuing those conversations within teams and reflecting on what people may need as change progresses.