

Leading to Change Community Events: Bringing your authentic self to work

26 October 2022

Community event series

Throughout the **Project Lift Community Engagement Events 2020/21** we explored the ‘what’ of leadership, collaborating as a community to establish the 12 indicators of good leadership.

In the **Project Lift Community Events Series 2021/22**, we then explored the ‘how’ of good leadership. We considered how we can practically live out these indicators in our everyday. As a result of this, we co created [10 practices that embed good leadership collectively](#), in recognition that the small things matter.

In the current **Community Event Series 2022/23**, and under the new branding of [Leading to Change](#), we will explore the leadership capability of self-leadership via various topics.

During this series, we aim to build on all of the previous work we have undertaken as a community and collectively explore what good leadership looks like in practice.

12 indicators of good leadership



This pack provides an overview of the discussions.

Bringing your authentic self to work

On 26 October 2022, we invited Leading to Change community members to come together to explore the topic '**bringing your authentic self to work**' and reflect on what opportunities can emerge within our own teams and organisations by doing so.

Our objectives for the session were to:

1. Learn how to bring our authentic, or whole selves, to our role
2. Learn how we lead ourselves and others
3. Share how we celebrate differences and strengths, considering diversity and inclusion, all in the service of improving care overall
4. Find out how to bring your best contribution as only you can and how it's okay for us all to be different

Flow of the session:

1. Welcome
2. Opening perspectives
3. Breakout discussions
4. Whole group sharing
5. Closing reflections and next steps

Who joined us?



Leading to Change exists to support leadership **at all levels and at all stages, in all roles across health, social care, and social work in Scotland.** A core aim of the community events series is to broaden the communities reach and connect to more of the system, and so this event were open to all.

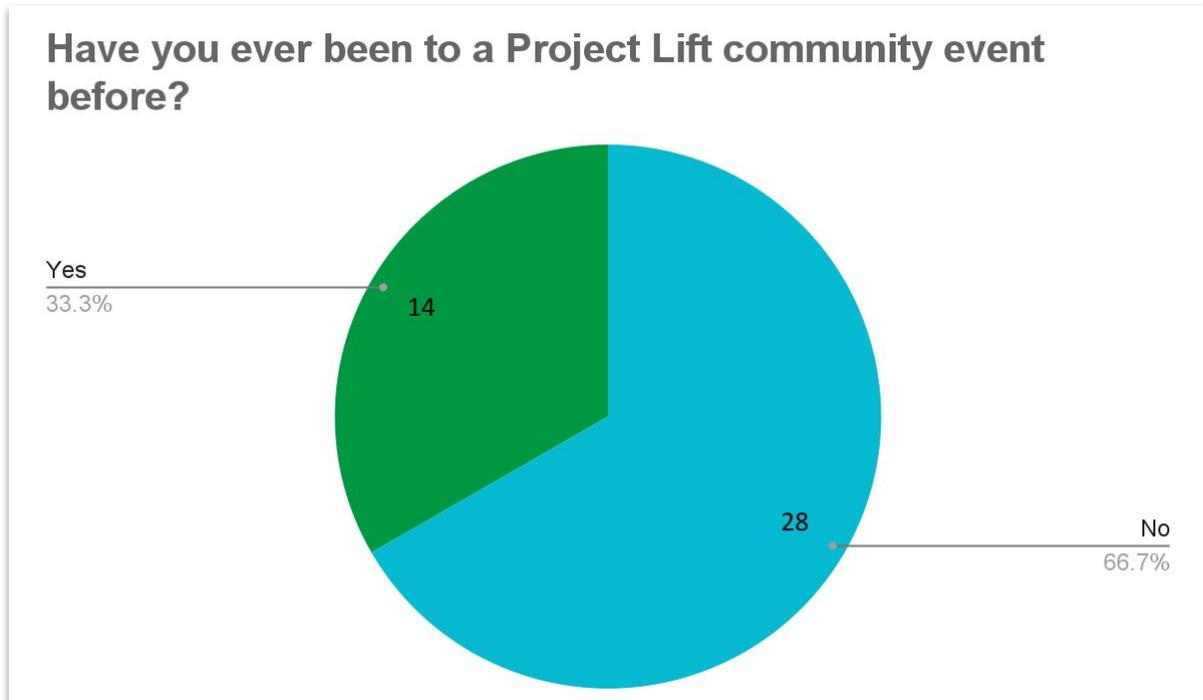
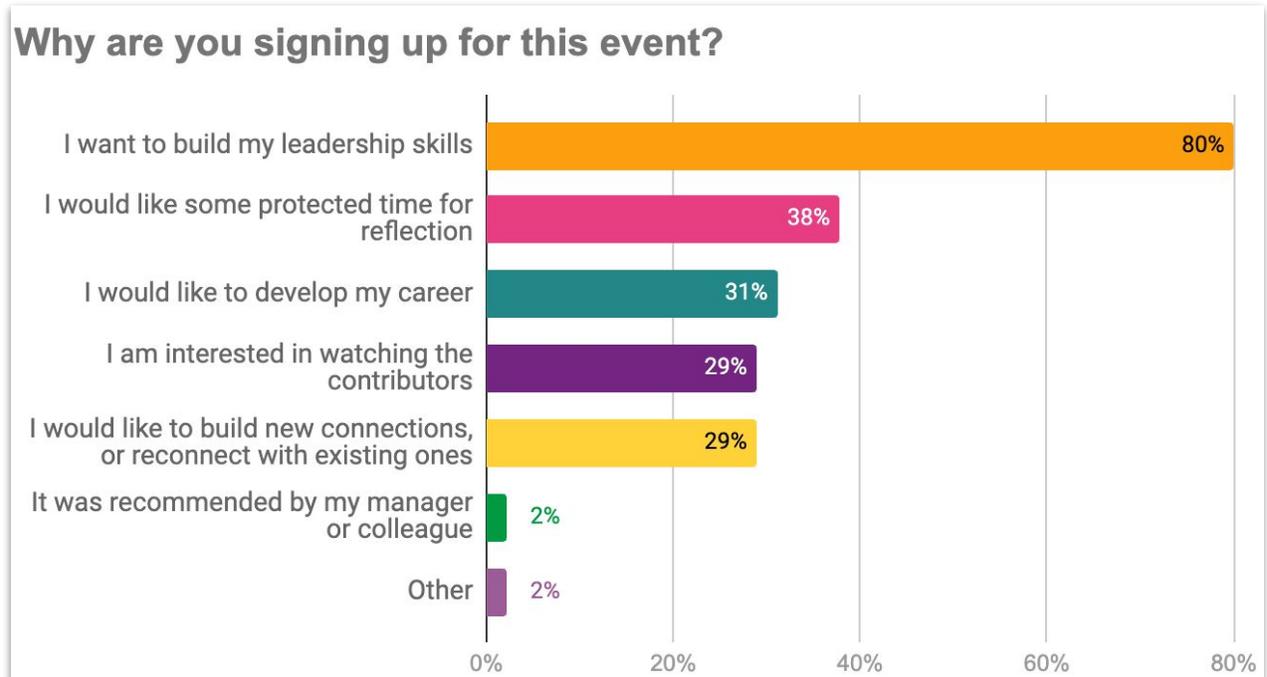
We were joined by **52** colleagues from across health, social care, and social work in Scotland.

Participants joined us from across the system, including those working in nursing, HR, organisation development, education, dietetics and social work.

This included a range of organisations across Scotland, including NHS Education for Scotland, local NHS organisations in Lothian; Tayside; Greater Glasgow and Clyde; Lanarkshire, Partners for Inclusion, Care Plus Bute, Royal College of Occupational Therapists, Social Work Scotland, Glasgow City Council, East Ayrshire Council, Shetland Islands Council, Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance and more.

Welcome and introductions

To understand who was in the room and why they joined, we ask participants: **‘Why are you signing up for this event?’** in the registration form and asked the poll question **‘Have you attended a Project Lift event before?’** during the session.



Contributors for the session

We then opened up the discussion by hearing from our contributors, who shared their own experiences on why it really means bring your authentic self to work. We asked them to reflect on the following:

“When have you felt the most authentic in your career and what motivates you to bring your authentic self to work?”

Our speakers:



Meg Wright
Interim CEO at Covey
Befriending



Manira Ahmad
Head of Local Intelligence,
Public Health Scotland



Derek Holliday
Involvement Lead,
Homeless Network
Scotland

Welcome from Leading to Change



Sara Dewar

Principal Lead & Digital,
Communications & Engagement Lead,
Leading to Change Delivery Team

“Leading to Change **supports leadership development** happening at local levels and elsewhere, but it also focuses on **bringing together leaders** from across health, social work and social care across public and independent sectors.

Everyone is welcome and **everyone’s voice is encouraged** in this growing community.

These events are not masterclasses but about **hearing from real people about real experiences**. Across this event series we will be focussing on the theme of **self leadership** and what that means to each of us individually.”

Opening perspectives - Meg Wright

“When have you felt the most authentic in your career and what motivates you to bring your authentic self to work?”



Meg Wright
Interim CEO at Covey
Befriending

“Bringing your authentic self to work is not as easy as it sounds. For me it’s something that has **evolved over time and over my career**. As an Interim CEO I work with organisations that are going through a transformation, change or crisis and I have to quickly understand that organisation and its people. I don’t have the opportunity to go through an induction due to the speed at which I need to understand an organisation, so being my authentic self **helps build connections and trust** with people.

As a CEO I need to find a balance between how open I can be but due to the nature of role I need to ask a lot of questions and that can be difficult for some people and they become defensive. I need an open book but I also **realise that others might be more reserved**. It’s okay to be reserved and to take time to build up relationships. Being authentic is realising that the way I am is fine for me but I need to **respect the way others are**.

The pandemic has helped open up our spaces and **create safe spaces through online platforms**. I’ve been using some of the techniques that we used during these online meetings in the real world to help bring that safe space into in person meetings.

Being authentic means **being honest, being aware when I need to reach out for help**, being aware of when I need to say I don’t know and so demonstrating a level of vulnerability which motivate others.”



Opening perspectives - Manira Ahmad

“When have you felt the most authentic in your career and what motivates you to bring your authentic self to work?”



Manira Ahmad

Head of Local Intelligence,
Public Health Scotland

“The time I have been most authentic has been **when I am truly me and I’ve embraced that**. It has helped to be more confident in what I do and I didn’t get that feeling of imposter syndrome.

When I tried to be someone that wasn’t me at work I didn’t feel right or comfortable. Being authentic is to **realise what our weaknesses are and what can we bring to a space**. When listening to someone, avoid using it to reload. Instead, try to **listen to truly hear what is being said**. Sometimes **having a conversation to connect** and understand a bit about someone’s life and at a personal level can bring authenticity to work.

Often we are very ambitious in our work, but sometimes scaling back our ambitions to something that makes sense to the majority of our colleagues can help **bring others along in our journey**. This is so everyone can engage with what we are trying to achieve as a collective and feel empowered to bring their authentic selves to the process.

As leader’s **we sometimes forget what it is like for people who are in junior roles** and who are carrying out operational activities and we need to connect with these people and make sure no one is left behind.”



Opening perspectives - Derek Holliday

“When have you felt the most authentic in your career and what motivates you to bring your authentic self to work?”



Derek Holliday

Involvement Lead,
Homeless Network
Scotland

“To begin supporting authenticity in the workplace, we must focus on **creating an environment that there is no perfection**. Keeping an informal environment can reduce pressure and encourage everyone to bring a bit of their authentic selves to work. Additionally, a work environment that **encourages learning** and reinforces that it’s okay that we won’t know everything everytime, **creates space for authenticity**.

As leaders we can **encourage and promote a culture that says it’s ok to make mistakes** and that everyone regardless of their role makes mistakes, this in turn encourages people to **be bold, authentic and try different things**.

As long as we are clear of what we expect from each other, what we can influence, what is the change we want to see and all of this is shared with everybody, people will remember what we are working towards. As long as people know they are **part of the vision for the organisation** and that they are **valued by the organisation** they will bring their whole selves to work.

Informal conversations hold particular value in bringing your authentic self to work. It helps build relationships and **understand how multifaceted our colleagues are**. We all wear many hats and by learning more about our colleagues we can **start to see people beyond their job titles**. ”



Reflections from participants

Our contributors opening perspectives inspired a lot of discussion from participants, who shared their reflections...

“Making sure that we take time to show others that they matter and we care is crucial - especially at times when they are feeling most vulnerable.”

“The pressure to conform is the enemy of authenticity.”

“Seeing and knowing people beyond roles, labels and hierarchies”

“It's one thing to be authentic when you are in a good place. Being authentic when you are in a vulnerable place needs a safe space, and unfortunately across the system and even within the same organisation, those safe spaces are not consistently available, so people exercise caution and hold back”

“The humanity part of us is really important and we sometimes forgot we need to show this to others - no one is perfect all the time”

“Being authentic, and recognising you don't need to know everything really helps with imposter syndrome.”

“Someone shared with me recently how they had felt they needed to 'put on their armour' before going to work and that recognising that made them realise they wanted to make changes. Quite a lot of unlearning to bring their authentic self to work!”

“Be yourself - everyone else is taken, good advice. Be curious about ourselves as well as others. What helps us connect with some people will be barriers with others so we need to see everyone as an individual.”

“Building spaces across the whole system is key to ensure we have diversity of views and opinions and importantly ideas”

Breakout discussions

Breakout discussions

We then went into breakout groups so participants could share reflections on what we heard from the contributors and reflect on how the topic resonates with them. Key themes and tips from the discussions included:

Striking the right balance in authenticity

- “Though it is important to be authentic there should be a balance between being your authentic selves and fulfilling your responsibilities”
- “We are all caring professionals and this means ‘giving a bit of ourselves’ every day at work. Finding the right balance of how much we share/give requires a lot of fine tuning”
- “A balance also need to be found between delivering the service/performance indicators and meeting the needs of our people”

Expressing vulnerability

- “It has been difficult to express vulnerability as this is not expected or welcomed in some teams and cultures”
- “There is a mindshift needed to see vulnerability as a strength not a weakness”

Learning over time to be authentic

- “Learning over time that being authentic is alright”
- “With age comes the realisation that it is harder not to be yourself and you would rather be you than use lots of energy to be the same as someone else”

The value of check ins and active listening

- “I’m realising the value of check ins and making time for your team and community”
- “There is value in asking people are they in a good space to listen to you first”
- “It’s important to listen to actually listen, not listen to answer”

Breakout discussions

Key themes and reflections from breakout discussions continued:

Importance of transparency

- “An organisation that is transparent can help its employees be able to bring their authentic selves to work”
- “Authenticity supports honesty and transparent ways of working. Helps to temper the ‘Doom and Gloom’ and creates a common purpose and meaningful interactions”

Overcoming barriers of authenticity

- “Toxic positivity can be an issue, if there is something wrong then it is more authentic to name it – and then respond in a positive way”
- “The organisational culture/processes/rules (written and unwritten) can make it easier or more difficult to be authentic”
- “There can be some really harmful messages given to people in their formative years e.g. leave your personal life at the door”
- “Imposter syndrome often keeps us back from being our true selves – what if we are not good enough? What if difference is not embraced?”

Creating safe spaces

- “A workplace that focuses on and encourages psychological safety can help foster a safe space culture.”
- “Psychological safe spaces to be honest and vulnerable”

Whole group reflections

As we heard the key themes that came out of discussion groups, participants shared their individual reflections and what was important to them, answering the question **“What is your one key reflection from your discussions?”**

“Being authentic isn't as simple or as straightforward as you might first think!”

“That it is ok to show your vulnerability”

“That being authentic and genuine will always help. Ensuring that moderation is key.”

“Allowing people to be honest in a safe space is key.”

“The importance of welcoming / looking for support from everywhere and anywhere.”

“Being authentic and genuine but striking a balance”

“Consider the difference between “announcing” a space as a safe space versus “demonstrating” it is a safe space.”

“It takes time to feel psychologically safe within an new environment and be reassured that it's not just lip service!”

“The importance of allies and that sometimes your authentic self isn't positive and wonderful, and that's ok.”

“Some reflections on being authentic within a professional code of conduct/regulations.”

“Balance is key”

“Agree re: toxic positivity on social media and this having the potential to impact on us negative”

“Someone having your back and supporting you. You are good enough!!”

“The different hat problem. Who am I today? Am I a worker or a leader or both”

“I'm reflecting on distinctions between vulnerability, honesty, authenticity...not 'performing'”

“Completely agree re if things are not good don't just pretend everything is great because you feel you need to lead.”

“Allyship - the difference having at least one person who knows you and has your back”

Final reflections

Closing reflections

Finally, we closed the session by reflecting on all of the conversations so far, and thinking about our next steps. We asked participants: **“What is one practical step you will take to apply the learning from today to either yourself, your team or your organisation?”**

“Do some work with team on creating a safe space to allow room for authenticity and failure.”

“Forgiving myself for letting off steam with a colleague this morning about various logistical challenges this week is presenting. Had been feeling bad that I had offloaded more than listened.”

“One thing that's just struck me... what changes when we become "leaders" that makes us feel like we are burdening others with authenticity, that we perhaps don't feel when we do not have a "leading" role?”

“Difficult to list just one but a really good reminder for me to always try to be the best version of myself but always aiming to strike the appropriate balance.”

“Creating leadership community, who I can talk to to, reflect with, find support”

“Where might I more openly be an ally - rather than assuming they know I am ..”

“From Manira's talk - to not try to be everything to everyone.”

“Creating good consistent leadership where staff can feel safe and supported.”

“Digging deep and recognising when I'm being authentic and noticing the self talk that prevents me from being authentic”

“Application of these steps is heavily reliant on us embodying them.”

“Ensure I have a safe space and don't try to be someone I am not. Create a safe space for others .”

“That it's ok not to have all the answers. Again that you can't be everything to everyone.”

Having this conversation in your own team

Thank you so much for joining us. Did you value the conversation, and would you like to take your learnings into your own community? Why not host your own conversation on how to embed indicators of ‘good leadership’ in our everyday practice? There are lots of ways you could do this, but here are our steps to hosting your own community conversation.

DIY: 1-hour community conversation

- **5 mins - Introductions:** Welcome participants and encourage everyone to grab a tea, coffee or lunch. Kick off introductions in the chat box, asking everyone to share who they are, where they're joining from and why.
- **5 mins - Opening perspective:** Introduction from the host sharing what you learnt from this event, and why you wanted to bring this conversation to your own team. Focus on storytelling, ask questions, and don't be afraid of the tricky issues!
- **30 mins - Breakout discussions:** As soon as the introduction is over, go into smaller breakout rooms. Discuss reflections from the introduction, own experiences, and what can we do, individually and as a team community, to foster cultures that place real value on relationships.
- **15 mins - Whole group discussion:** Ask for a volunteer from small groups to share the top themes that came out of their discussion, then open up the floor for reflections.
- **5 mins - Closing reflections:** Spend 30 seconds in strictest silence individually reflecting on the discussion, and share a closing reflection in chat. Use a prompt to get people thinking about practical next steps: "One practical step I will take away from the discussions is...". As you close, remember to ask participants to share their feedback on the discussion.



Evaluation

We asked participants for their reflections on the session. 15 participants responded to our feedback survey.

Their reflections included:

100

% of respondents would recommend an event like this to a colleague.

93

% of respondents agreed this event provided them with time for reflection on their leadership practice.

93

% of respondents agreed this event felt like a psychologically safe space.

What participants said about this event

- “Great speakers and gives you the motivation to do some self reflections”
- “The session was very informative and it was great to hear other peoples stories about bringing their authentic selves to work”
- “The speakers were very engaging and inspiring. The event was organised and facilitated well. It was an enjoyable learning experience.”
- “Useful time to reflect, and to hear views from different organisations”

Thank you

If you have any questions about anything in this pack or any of the events in the series, feel free to contact us at jamey@kscopehealth.org.uk.