Compassionate Leadership for High Quality Health and Care

with Michael West

Project Lift Community-hosted Conversations

9 March 2021

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Has kindness become too fashionable?

Here at Project Lift, our purpose is to offer a different way of looking at leadership at all levels, in all roles, working collaboratively and choosing to work compassionately to help our staff meet these challenges.

Our community-hosted conversations are about providing the opportunity and space for the wider Project Lift community to open a conversation on a leadership issue that is important to them.

On **9 March 2021, Professor Michael West** from the King's Fund hosted a community conversation on compassion and compassionate leadership. Michael has been involved in compassionate, collective and inclusive leadership research and thinking for a number of years and has worked closely with health and care organisations and systems. Michael hosted the conversation, focusing on the importance and relevance of compassionate leadership in the wider health and care system.

Thank you to everyone who joined us on the day - it was fantastic to have your perspective in the conversation.

We set out to:

Provide space for our hosts to open a conversation, share their experiences and engage with different perspectives from the community on an aspect of leadership. In this instance, our host addressed compassion in leadership, self-compassion, and creating the necessary spaces to reflect and learn.

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This pack provides an overview of the discussions we had on the day

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Who joined us?

Project Lift exists to support leadership **at all levels and at all stages, in all roles across health and social care in Scotland.** A core aim of the community events series is to broaden Project Lift's reach and connect to more of the system, and so these events were open to all.

We were joined by **73 colleagues** from across health and care in Scotland. Participants joined us from across the system, in a range of roles, including roles such as Organisational Lead for Publishing Services, Assistant Service Manager, Occupational Therapist, Management Trainee and Chief Social Work Officer/ Head of Adult Services.

This included a range of organisations across Scotland from both healthcare and social services. Organisations included NHS Tayside, Borders, Orkney and Grampian, as well as Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Public Health Scotland, Alzheimer Scotland, Research for Real and Single Homeless Project.

The majority of participants were from healthcare organisations (79%), while a smaller proportion were from social services or organisations spanning both healthcare and social social services (16%). There was also a small number of participants form organisations outside of healthcare and social services (6%).

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We kickstarted the session with an introduction from Jenni Jones, **Principal Lead at Project Lift,** who welcomed the group and provided an introduction to [Project Lift and its ethos](#), and framed the session around our experiences during Covid-19.

To gain an idea of how much people know about Project Lift, we began by asking attendees:

'Have you attended a Project Lift event before?'

We welcomed both attendees who had been to a number of Project Lift events and those who it was their first event. There was a fairly even split between participants who had previously attended a Project Lift event and those who had not.

Have you been to a Project Lift event before?

Yes
45.5%

No
54.5%

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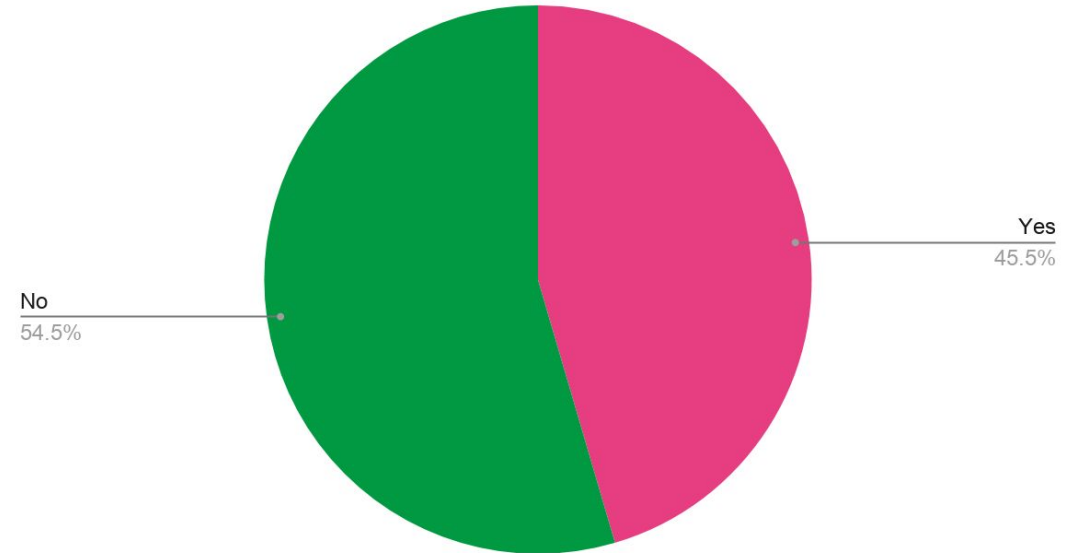
Opening Perspective

Section 2: Opening perspectives

We began the session by hearing an introduction from Professor Michael West from the King's Fund, who has been instrumental in the work of Project Lift from the beginning. Michael has been involved in compassionate, collective and inclusive leadership research and thought leadership for a number of years and has worked closely with health and care organisations and systems.

Michael West
The King's Fund

In Michael's opening perspective, he explored what we mean by compassion in health and care and the impact it can have. He shared data and research that demonstrated the physical effect that compassion can have on health outcomes, as well as dispelling the myths of compassionate leadership. He explored the topic through highlighting 4 elements of compassionate leadership:

- Attending: paying attention to staff – 'listening with fascination'
- Understanding: shared understanding of what they face
- Empathising
- Helping: taking intelligent action to serve or help

He also explored how this related to team working, especially during remote working, and psychological safety. He discussed the importance of 'self-compassion' and the importance of practicing this as a leader.

Please watch a recording of Michael's talk here. He has very kindly recorded answers to the questions we did not have time to address and you can watch these on the same link from the timestamp 48:40.

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Section 2: Reflections from participants

During Michael's opening perspective, there was a number of questions, comments and reflections from participants. Michael's follow up video responding to the participant questions we did not have time for can be seen in this video (at 48:40). An overview of some of the the themes discussed:

Purpose

"I know of an area that the sickness absence rate reduced massively during the pandemic - seems that there was a much greater focus on 'purpose' which hadn't been there previously"

"How can we maintain that sense of purpose we achieved during the pandemic balanced by not taking advantage of the good will it created - this could lead to stress and burnout. It's a fine balance."

Compassion at a system level

"How do we want to show up a work? How can we care for ourselves and one another? Listening to understand and building connections which are honest and trusting. Speaking up when it's easier to stay quiet."

"Removing barriers and ensuring staff have what they need to do their work. We are starting to see an increase of applications for both training and vacancies in NHS. How can we engage, build and grow a new generation of employees in a more compassionate environment"

"Leaders who enable those they lead rather than focusing on protecting their own power"

Power

"Showing compassion to those who manage us is a massive challenge, believing that they are working in our interests - but it definitely comes down to role modelling no matter your place in the structure, and engaging with them."

"Looking at the early stages of careers we need to promote compassionate leadership and compassion between staff as important an objective as, for example, our clinical objectives."

"The best way that i have heard power talked about is that it is not a possession but rather a relationship. Shifting that frame of reference is hugely important"

Authentic compassion

"'Authentic' versus 'acting compassionately' - there are definitely some days where compassion comes easily, and some days / patients / other staff where you really have to work at it…"

"How much of a difference is there in someone who is authentically compassionate vs someone who is trying to act compassionate?"

Breakout discussions

Section 3: Breakout discussions

We then went into breakout rooms to explore our reflections, and discuss what resonated from Michael's talk and what we can learn about compassionate leadership.

Reflecting on what you have heard and your own experiences, discuss:

1. What resonated from the introduction?

2. How can we develop our own compassion as leaders?

3. How can we develop our practice of self-compassion as leaders?

4. How can we create the necessary space to reflect and learn?

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Section 3: Breakout discussions

What can we learn about compassionate leadership in health and social care. Key themes from our discussions:

Recognising the pressure many people are under and its impact on compassion

- Many groups discussed the realities of how people are working, especially at the moment. Many people recognised the pressure people working in health and social care are under, and how this can impact how compassionate an environment or our actions are. For example, many people experience high workload, late nights,and being 'constantly available'.
- For example, during the pandemic, many people working in health and social care are taking on an increased risk to themselves, while the things many people do to destress after work are also not open.
- Some groups discussed what we can do to change this. Some people discussed the theme of empowerment, and how we an help people to empower themselves. They felt this is done through building trust as leaders.
- Role modelling was also a key theme, for example, being aware of the impact that sending emails on the weekend might have on staff, or encouraging people to go home when they should.

Relationships

- The theme of relationships and how this relates to compassion particularly resonated with some participants. They highlighted the value of making connections, investing in them, psychological safety and getting to know the person and what they value.

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Section 3: Breakout discussions

Influencing the culture

- Some groups discussed ways to influence the culture. They explored how small things, and every interaction, like every email you send or conversation you have can impact the culture.
- One participant shared an example of ways the culture can be influenced. In their workplace they have introduced protected mealtimes for staff, where there are no meetings between 12 and 1. This has been successful, and staff are now deliberately scheduling this time themselves.
- Some participants discussed how the importance of listening to staff to change the culture of an organisation - listening to people on the ground who have the solutions.

How can we create the necessary space to reflect and learn?

- The groups discussed the importance of reflection, and particularly what we can do to create the necessary space to reflect and learn.
- Some participants discussed reflecting on successes as teams - ensuring that people are able to celebrate success and share what they've learnt and come together socially. This has been difficult over Covid-19 as work schedules have taken priority.
- One participant shared how they have a 'leadership journal', where they reflect every 2 weeks on what's happened and difficulties they experienced. This gives them a chance to take time to think about achievements, rather than just ticking off tasks.
- Some groups discussed how they've made reflection a more embedded part of their work, for example, making reflection a deliberate part of the appraisal process or in supervision sections. Team check-ins can also be a time for reflection, not just for getting down tasks.
- Self awareness, being curious, listening and empathy are important as leaders to create spaces for reflection, but also to role model this for the team.

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How can we develop our own self-compassion practice?

- Participants discussed what it looks like for them to practice self-compassion. For some this is ensuring they have protected break time, allowing yourself some 'slack', going for a walk in the day and taking time for other hobbies.
- To develop our own practice of self-compassion, self-awareness is important as it looks different for different people. One participant discussed the importance of 'speaking to our inner child', and getting back to nurturing ourselves. Being aware of your own triggers and recognising what is important to you through reflective practice is important to understanding what self-compassion looks like to you.
- As leaders, demonstrating the values of self-compassion is important. Allowing the team space to practice this for themselves, having check-ins and role modelling the behaviours is important to show that the value of self-compassion is valued.
- In some workplaces, high workload is part of the culture, and there is a risk that being 'busy' is seen as a badge of pride, which can impact the culture and how people have space for self-compassion.

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Closing reflections

Section 4: Closing reflections

Returning from breakout rooms, we asked participants to share what they discussed in breakout rooms: **"What is your one key reflection from your discussions?"**

"The importance of role modelling - it's so easy to continue to embed the culture of overwork"

"Make the time for self reflection and self compassion and then make sure you PROTECT it"

"Relationships, listening with fascination, living with disagreement - and don't ignore the elephants in the room (chronic excessive workload, spending too much time on work of little perceived value e.g. audit)"

"All comes down to people"

"Creating good habits for self compassion"

"The importance of being present either with team members or yourself"

"We can't go back to where we were"

"Little things can make a big difference"

"Relationships are the key to the impact of compassion on self, colleagues, those we serve, organisations and outcomes"

"It's evidence based and cost effective and continue to articulate and practise compassion based leadership"

"Listening with fascination - take time to listen and to be interested, give 2 more mins as so much more is shared, trust built and reflection enabled"

"Importance of taking time to reflect and learn"

"People and relationships are key. Self-compassion is just as vital in order to be a successful compassionate leader."

"There are 4 key leadership values we need to attend to, compassion, collaboration, collective and INCLUSION"

"Aligned to the self-compassion Q. Be aware and active in what is on your mental palette, like not watching the news which is designed to create drama."

"We need to change the culture and support each other at all levels, listen to hear and become the role model for change."

"Time for change vs reaction and pressure in the system. Stress and burnout needs to be paid attention to - can't sweep past to get to the next part"

"What people need to feel at work, autonomy, belonging, contribution. I love the term 'listen with fascination'. Such a brilliant speaker and I could listen all day"

"The human element - how truly important this is to our work and every aspect of our lives. The evidence provided was really powerful."

"We find it easier to be kinder to our colleagues than we are to ourselves. Practice self compassion"

"The importance of modelling behaviour"

Section 4: 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: **"One practical step I will take away from this conversation is…"**

"Keep practising what I preach (and getting back on the horse when I fail)"

"I will take all this wisdom to future meetings , it is heartwarming that Michael has given so much for us to reflect on. Gratitude coming your way, thank you "

"Taking time out as a team to reflect"

"Self-reflection"

"Stop interrupting and start listening with fascination"

"Confidence to continue to promote and facilitate inclusive compassionate leadership"

"I'm going to look out for publication from HEI Wales. Thanks very much to Michael too"

"Some great discussions in the breakout room about small steps for improving reflective practice and leadership development"

"Practice listening with fascination"

"The art of being present in my engagements with people"

" Start listening with fascination and make more space to enable that to happen"

"Share the burdens"

"Keep practising letting go, relaxing and being in the moment - enjoy what comes of it."

"Prioritise the importance of building compassionate relationships with my team"

"Build in down time for the team meetings"

"Start reflecting!"

"Self care is not the same as wellbeing, yoga and massages are fine but self care enables us to care for others - and across teams"

"Give time for self reflection and self compassion"

"To listen with fascination"

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Having this conversation in your own team

Thank you so much for joining us. Did you value the conversation and want to take your learnings into your own community? Why not host your own conversation on what 'good leadership' looks like?

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.

Thank you for joining us

Thank you and evaluation

Finally, thank you so much for being a part of this Project Lift event.

Thank you for your energy, perspective and contributions to the session, and for helping us to explore what good leadership means.

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

What our participants thought...

100 % of participants would recommend an event like this to a colleague

Average Score: **5/5**

What participants said about the event:

- "Sharing ideas, building bonds/bridges"
- "Michael West is an inspiring speaker. Excellent and informative content."
- "Excellent opportunity to hear voices new to you and explore their relevance to your situation and wider team /organisation"
- "Because of its impact on changing the way things are done in health organisations, improving patients outcomes and enabling health workers/leaders to carry out care the best way possible"
- "Great to have any event with attendees from across health and social care"
- "The opportunity to engage with a group of motivated and inspiring people."

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