

Leading to Change Community Event: Having challenging conversations with respect

22 November 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.

Having challenging conversations with respect

On 22 November 2022, we invited Leading to Change community members to come together to explore the topic '**Having challenging conversations with respect**' 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 from others about how to respond to challenging conversations with compassion.
2. Share how we have supportive conversations with each other.
3. Find out how we can manage our own ability to deal with pressures with compassion when our wellbeing is hard to maintain.

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.

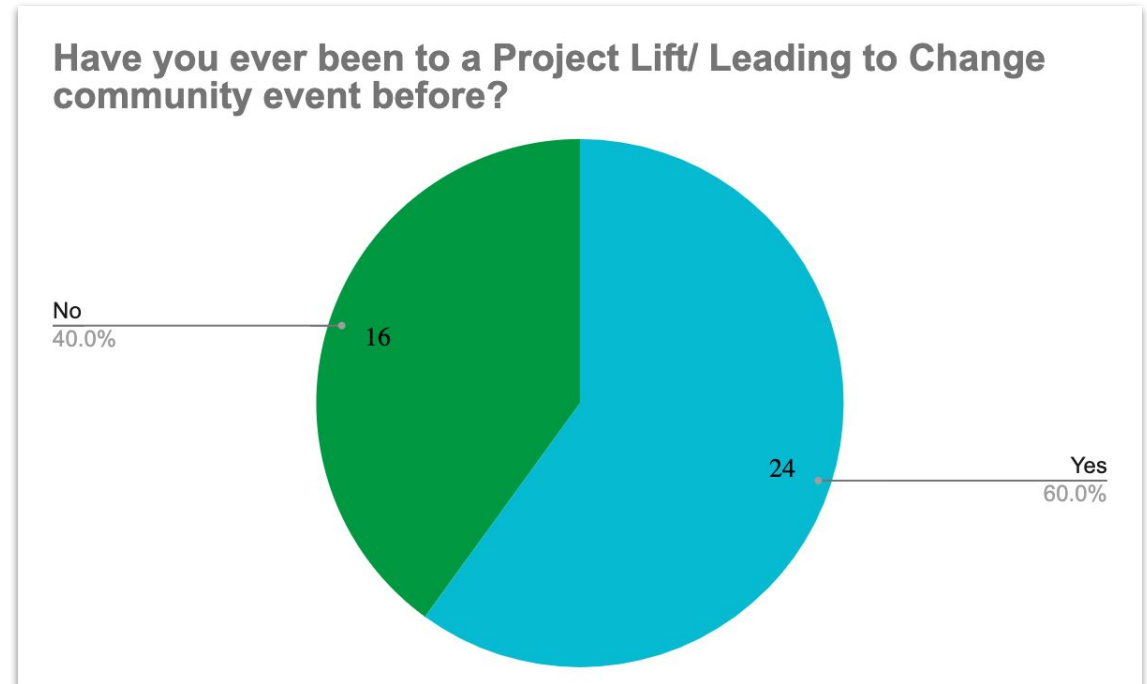
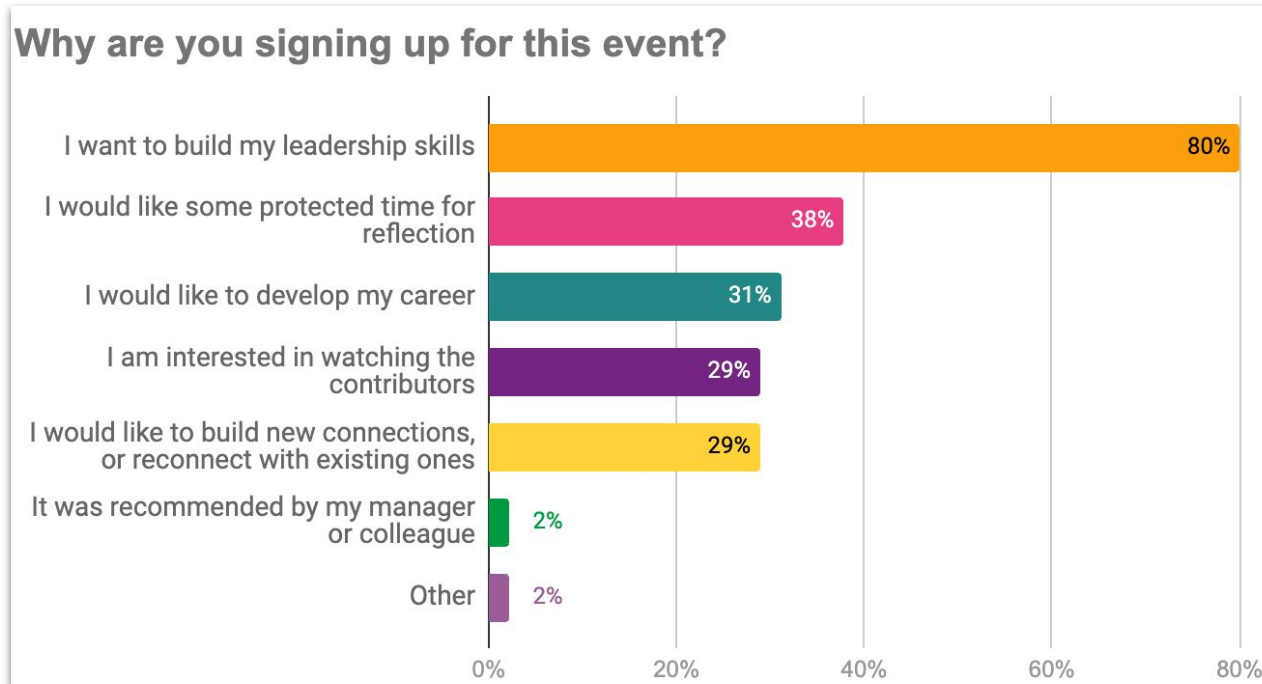
We were joined by **71** colleagues from across health, social care, and social work in Scotland.

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; Borders; Lanarkshire, Neighbourhood Networks, NHS Scotland, Public Health Scotland, Glasgow City HSCP, Healthcare Improvement Scotland 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/ Leading to Change event before?’** during the session.



40 participants responded to the poll. Nearly **two thirds of participants had attend** a previous Project Lift/ Leading to Change community event before. The majority of participants were primarily looking to **build their leadership skills, have time for reflection, and develop their career.**

Contributors for the session

We then opened up the discussion by hearing from our contributors, who shared their own experiences on how to have challenging conversations with respect.

Our speakers:



Laic Khalique

Director of Digital Technology, NHS Tayside,
Chair, NHS Scotland's National Public Sector
Minority Ethnic Equality Forum



Rosanne Cubitt

Head of Practice
(Counselling and Mediation),
Relationships Scotland



Alyson McKechnie-Vale

Business Director and
Creative Care Producer,
Abbotsford Care

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 - Laic Khalique



Laic Khalique

Director of Digital Technology,
NHS Tayside, Chair, NHS
Scotland's National Public Sector
Minority Ethnic Equality Forum

“Conversation is a two way process. Both parties could be impacted and will need to be prepared going into a challenging conversation. This first priority is **ensure that communication is as direct as possible** so that you can get to the point quickly. Difficult conversations can increase in difficulty when communication is muddled. It is really important to think carefully about the direction of the conversation, and to try to plan it out as much as possible.

Remain thoughtful around the use of language and think about the actual words that you are going to use during a challenging conversation, particularly the potential impact these words may have on the other person. When navigating challenging conversations, it is also important to **manage your own emotions** to prevent them from interfering with the support that you are offering others.

When I am dealing with people who have experienced something quite hurtful, I also think that **it is important to listen carefully and offer colleagues space to talk about their experience**. Where possible, try to offer a solution for them to get the support that they need - this may include thinking about potential mental health resources.”



Opening perspectives - Rosanne Cubitt



Rosanne Cubitt

Head of Practice
(Counselling and Mediation),
Relationships Scotland

“Having worked within the National Office for Relationship Scotland for the last 20 years, my experience in this area has developed from managing and influencing a wide range of different views and interests between 21 independent member agencies. In addition to this, working as a family mediator involved helping often emotionally charged parents to find solutions for their children and parenting following separation. Reflecting on this topic, my role as a family mediator is to help parents navigate challenging conversations with respect.

My mantra is - **seek first to understand what the other person’s perspective is on the situation**. Often difficulties in communications arise from misunderstanding. Consider the potential context of the other person - difficulty may stem from challenging events outside of work, or events from their past triggered by the present situation.

Remember to **‘HALT’** when managing our own wellbeing and to avoid reactive responses. This model reminds us to arrange a suitable time to have challenging conversations when we are not: **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired.**”



Opening perspectives - Alyson McKechnie-Vale



Alyson McKechnie-Vale
Business Director and
Creative Care Producer,
Abbotsford Care

“My feedback on this topic comes from working with relatives, residents and staff in the care home setting. Challenging conversations can be one of the most difficult aspects of leadership, and **I’ve found that what holds us back from having these conversations is our fixation on what might go wrong.** However, it is important to consider what could do right, and the positive aspects of these types of conversations - taking a strengths based approach to promote the positive aspects towards moving forward together.

My approach when navigating difficult conversations is to use visual prompt cards, as **it’s often much easier for people to express themselves through the use of visual imagery compared to immediately talking about it.** When looking at images together, what you can then build is a vocabulary of emotions and you can present alternative viewpoints to each other without it being threatening.

I would also encourage the use of the 7 C’s - we’re all working in very complex systems and its important to encourage each other to be vulnerable when necessary. The 7 C’s are **‘collaborate, be curious, connect emotionally, consider other perspectives, celebrate, compromise and courage’.** Creating open cultures where we can be sensitive to the needs of those you are working with by recognising how we can work together, can help turn these challenges into more positive conversations.”



Reflections from participants

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

“Sharing with each other is so important. We all have tips and advice so useful to hear.”

“Always start from self.”

“Plan when you can but if in a ‘fire fighting situation’ listen and reconvene.”

“It’s important to look after yourself before & after difficult conversations, do the things that help you care for yourself. Empathy, understanding there may be other things going on in other person's life/trauma.”

“Challenge is good, rather than being defensive and pushing back - ask questions.”

“The importance of honesty and having the courage to have a challenging conversation. It will help in the long run rather than not addressing the issues.”

“Creating the right environment for the conversation, preparing the conversation in advance, using prompt cards.”

“Responding in the moment to unplanned difficult conversations, take a step back and take control by setting another date and time to discuss.”

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:

Being self aware and present

- “The importance of really listening and staying present, rather than preparing what you will say next.”
- “Prepare yourself both in terms of how you are feeling and self care, and ask yourself if this is the right time, ensuring the other person knows the purpose of the conversation.”
- “Be clear on your intention when making difficult points rather than expecting the other person to know your intentions.”

Preparing the right environment

- “It is often better to have the challenging conversations face to face as it is much easier to pick up on nuances of body language, gaps in the conversation.”
- “It is important to create the time and space for the conversation, and ensure distractions are limited.”

Importance of compassion

- “Seek to create psychological safety and provide a safe space. This includes trust, shared values and purpose.”
- “Accepting and reflecting on the other person’s perspective – they might be more accurate than our own? This demonstrates empathy and concern”

The value of active listening

- “Having challenging conversations virtually requires even greater attention to some of the key skills and practices highlighted and perhaps more sophisticated skills. So it is important to prepare in advance, remain attentive and present, and practice active listening.”

Additional resources

Colleagues shared some of their recommendations for resources to explore that included...

Moving Motivators

- Invented by founder of [Management 3.0](#), Jurgen Appelo, [Moving Motivators](#) is an exercise meant to help us reflect on motivation and how it affects organizational change.
- The Moving Motivators exercise is based on ten motivators, which Jurgen derived from the works of Daniel Pink, Steven Reiss, and Edward Deci.
- These ten motivators are either intrinsic, extrinsic, or a bit of both.
- Moving Motivators is also available as an official template on [Miro](#).

COIN feedback method

- A feedback model that is easy to remember is the COIN method which stands for:
- **Context:** In what context did the situation take place?
- **Observation:** What were the objective facts that took place?
- **Impact:** What were the consequences of this event? How did it affect people, teams, performance etc?
- **Next Steps:** What can be done to improve things in the future?

Websites for more resources

- [Mind Tools](#) offers more than 2,500 resources to help you develop your personal wellbeing and career skills.*

**Leading to Change does not formally endorse third party resources as shared by our contributors, however we do provide details to offer the opportunity for others to explore should they wish to do so. Leading to Change has no formal partnership with Mind Tools, Management 3.0 or Miro.*

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?”**

“See people as individuals and don’t assume how they will react or respond.”

“Showing vulnerability helps build relationship & rapport.”

“Investing in yourself is important to help you manage your responses better.”

“Allow space for reflection.”

“Take time to prepare and step back from the situation to gain perspective.”

“Learn from the past but don’t let it hold you back.”

“Environment can give a new perspective – don’t always meet in the same place, try a new room, café or walk.”

“Avoid where possible using texts or emails – we can read them wrong. If you have received a text or email, try to respond by phone or face to face.”

“Value individual stories – use yours when trying to connect with others.”

“The importance of stopping before a conversation.”

“Try to step into the shoes of the others.”

“Remain curious.”

“If you need to respond in the moment - take a breath and hold the space, don’t rush.”

“Relational, build rapport with colleagues.”

“Investing in yourself is important to help you manage your responses better.”

“Try going for a walk and having the call on the phone or meet face to face and go for a walk.”

“Remain calm enough to be curious – dealing with emotion, anger.”

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?”**

“I will share the 7 C’s with my team.”

“Read some of the suggested models.”

“I will remember the importance of preparation and environment.”

“Being comfortable in myself and strive to lead with kindness, curiosity and compassion.”

“Reflect on this and how I can use it as well as share with colleagues.”

“Listen to understand, consider context, and provide peer support.”

“Continue to notice wellbeing as a key element of preparation.”

“Reflect on and share the HALT model with others.”

“Share helpful links and resources I come across with other colleagues.”

“Use ‘Moving Motivators’ with our team.”

“To really come to discussions without my own agenda or judgement, to truly understand the other point of view.”

“Putting aside time to reflect on how I currently handle these things and where I could improve.”

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. **19 participants** responded to our feedback survey.

Their reflections included:

100

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

90

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

89

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

What participants said about this event

- “I have gathered lots of insights from direct experiences of having difficult conversations in a short period of time, thank you.”
- “The discussions gave me further resources and tools to read in advance of having challenging conversations.”
- “The presenters and those sharing were clearly knowledgeable and confident in sharing. It projected this effortlessness to the participants, myself”
- “The course was fantastic. Facilitators quickly created a space where it was possible to be open and transparent. It was great to hear other people's insights and be able to share my own.”

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.