

PROJECT

Using conversation mapping to surface undiscussables

PRACTITIONER

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APPROX. DATE

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SITUATION AND CONTEXT

Organisations often struggle to talk about the real issues—especially where there are tensions or taboos.

SYSTEM OF INTEREST

The informal communication patterns within teams and organisations – case study was a large County Council.

APPROACH TAKEN

Applied tools such as the Ladder of Inference and conversation mapping to understand where key topics were being avoided and create practices and skills for more productive conversations. Provided a ‘holding environment’ for initial practising and surfacing of ‘difficult conversations’.

MODELS AND INSIGHTS DEVELOPED

- Surfaced patterns of avoidance, overuse of or reliance on defensive routines, long-standing issues that were reducing effectiveness and commitment, and built improvement relationships and decision-making
- Helped teams distinguish between dialogue and performance

KEY INTERVENTIONS UNDERTAKEN

- Facilitated reflective sessions on ‘undiscussables’
- Developed custom conversation maps and feedback models

RESULTS

- Teams developed greater psychological safety and increased motivation
- Some long-standing conflicts were constructively addressed

AFTERTHOUGHTS

Surfacing tough issues takes skill and care, but it’s foundational to systems practice. The approach was built in to leadership practice and recruitment.

CONCLUSION

Understanding communication as a system helps organisations address the roots of misalignment.