

Gil Sawford/Graham Gourlay
c/- WLF Consulting Pty Ltd
GPO Box 1083
HOBART TAS 7001

20 August 2021

Ms Kate Jenkins
Sex Discrimination Commissioner
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Ms Jenkins

Introduction

While we prepared our (recently lodged) submission to the Department of Finance's Tender ATMMAPSTF02 (titled: *Education program for parliamentary staff on safe and respectful workplaces*), in which we strongly urged the Department to embed and sustain the education and training program by equipping Parliamentarians' Offices to work continuously on their awareness of the issue and on their culture, we were unaware that the intention was for your inquiry to address systemic, longer term measures to achieve and maintain the required respectful behaviour and culture in those Offices.

We attach – and will enclose with the hard copy of this letter – our submission to that ATM. We apologise for having missed your 31 July deadline for submissions to your Review and ask you to exercise your discretion, please, in the national interest, and accept our late submission for consideration.

Shaping and sustaining the required respectful culture is key

Our presentation to that Tender reflects our firm belief – as well as the stand taken in the key, relevant academic literature – that more needs to be done to address sexual harassment and bullying – negative or harmful behaviours generally - than training and education and that systemic (on-going) prevention, culture-shaping, -embedding and -maintenance strategies and processes are crucially important to achieve and sustain the respectful workplace. As you will appreciate, system-wide change and improvement interventions – such as shaping the culture – are considered much more effective than education and training interventions; they (the former) are classified as 'powerful'.

We are pleased that establishing your inquiry into more systemic, longer term, preventive actions and solutions with its focus on determining what needs to be done to prevent and stamp out such behaviours, reflects this insight.

Our preventive and sustainable approach to culture-shaping and embedding

It is this insight, this understanding and our relevant experience working, consulting and coaching in a range of organisations (our two Principals have jointly had over 70 years of experience in improving organisations, particularly organisational culture) that led us to develop and use a methodology for shaping, embedding and sustaining workplace culture and to then undertake a major research project that ran over several years to test, evaluate and measure the effectiveness of that methodology.

Our methodology prevents such harmful behaviours and sustains the power of prevention for as long as the methodology is practiced. It therefore strongly supports, reinforces and delivers on the intent of your Inquiry.

The methodology: Overview - & Why it is effective

Every member of a workgroup will participate in:

- (i) The group bonding and building trust, a sense of safety in the group and a sense of joint and individual ownership of their vision for the best possible (respectful) workplace climate. By consciously establishing and experiencing the creation, maintenance, usage and benefits of a safe environment everyone knows for certain that they are expected by the group to share any concerns (i.e. to 'voice') and that they will always be supported by colleagues when they do speak up.
- (ii) The regular workgroup meetings where the group engages in reflective conversation -
 - a. on how the group members are experiencing the climate or culture relative to the agreed vision and where the group co-designs activities to address any issues
 - b. on the extent to which their vision for the workgroup climate is meeting the group's current realities or needs
 - c. and where everyone will be reminded of the training they received in respectful relationships and of their shared and individual commitment to and accountability for bringing to life (i.e. achieving) their agreed vision of what it will be like to work in this group
 - d. and where everyone will be reminded that anyone who engages in any inappropriate or even discomforting behaviour will be challenged about their behaviour in their workgroup and that they will not get away with it without being confronted or challenged about their behaviour.
- (iii) This bottom-up workplace culture-shaping, culture-embedding and culture maintenance approach empowers every member of the workgroup to be accountable for making their work environment the very best it can be - for everyone. It also equips everyone, through regular conversation in the group, through practice and through routinely providing opportunities to observe colleagues modelling such positive behaviours and practicing the skills to speak up about anything troubling them ('voicing'). People learn best from one another. Everyone soon learns that any group member's experience of questionable or unacceptable behaviour will be shared with their colleagues in this group and that anyone speaking up will be supported. Potential perpetrators of harmful behaviours or negative acts will know that they will not get away with such behaviour. It will invariably become a matter for the whole workgroup – for all their colleagues.

- (iv) Our approach therefore involves experiential learning and self-regulation of the culture at the group level by all members of participating groups, which makes it highly engaging and empowering, building in each participant (i.e. every staff member eventually, when the rippling-out is completed) a sense of ownership of the culture and of responsibility for strengthening and sustaining it. These senses - of ownership, responsibility, accountability, collegiality and empowerment – make the individual feel trusted and valued by the employer, which has positive effects on self-esteem, engagement, morale, performance and well-being.

A key dynamic delivered by our methodology and central to its effectiveness

- It is widely recognised in the relevant academic literature that people behave inappropriately (harass, bully, etc) when - and often because - they believe that they will get away with it.
- Our methodology fixes (*it actually prevents*) the problem of negative or harmful behaviour (*from arising*) in organisations because it ensures – through shaping, continuously monitoring and sustaining the desired culture and equipping (empowering, skilling and providing regular opportunities to model and practice speaking up about concerns) the group members to ensure - that a perpetrator will not get away with any unacceptable behaviour.
- This process creates a positive, collaborative climate and a safe setting for everyone to have all the respectful, constructive conversations they need to have. Creating, maintaining and regularly having opportunities to use and so embed this culture more deeply effectively inoculates the workgroup from sexual harassment, bullying and any other harmful, unacceptable behaviour.

Our research

We have proven-up, through practical experience and confirmed by real world research conducted in a variety of workplace settings (the report on the results of our research is provided), the effectiveness of the process (our methodology) where a workgroup creates and sustains a safe workgroup environment where all forms of bullying and harassment, all negative acts, are prevented, using -

- (i) the activity of the group envisioning the best possible workplace and then
- (ii) the group routinely using regular reflective conversations to create, nurture and maintain the group's ideal work environment as well as a sense of safety and trust in the group.

Additional benefits of our approach

- Our group process intervention will substantially embed, reinforce, enhance and, importantly, also sustain the benefits of the education and training provided through ATMMAPSTF02.
- Our process will effectively deal with the problem of future new starters in Parliamentarians' Offices missing out on the 2021 training and education initiative as it can be confidently anticipated – expected even – that there will be people in every Parliamentarian's Office who will have the experience of our group process and the capability and interest to induct

new starters into the process, to advise them on its *raison d'être* and to guide them in contributing to and using the regular reflective conversations to support their colleagues and their own enjoyment from working in this group (Office) as well as their own health and wellbeing.

Training – on its own – is not enough!

It is widely recognised in the professions concerned with improving organisational performance, safety and effectiveness – it is, for example, clearly articulated in the international literature on Root Cause Analysis* that is used widely to learn the lessons from mistakes and to take action to ensure mistakes are not repeated - that training and education, alone, are limited in their effectiveness to fix problems in organisational behaviour, processes and human relationships and are not, in our experience and in the literature, powerful drivers of behaviour change.

Moreover, and on the other hand, it is recognised that culture change is a powerful driver of behavioural change, improved performance and improved workplaces generally. Culture change integrates desired, respectful behaviour (such behaviour of course being the purpose or the intent of the ATM training program) into the very fabric of the workgroup or organisation. (As noted above, training and education do not achieve such integration of desired behaviours into the organisation's or the workgroup's fabric.)

(*While not wishing for a moment to be seen to be denigrating the value of training and its professionals' contributions to organisational performance, it is noted that the US National Patient Safety Foundation in its Report '*RCA2 Improving Root Cause Analyses and Action to Prevent Harm*' in the Action Hierarchy tool (p. 17) ranks 'Training' in the category of 'Weaker Actions'.) and comments (p. 18) "*Wider training is also not an effective solution; there is always turnover and a high-profile event today may be forgotten in the future. ... Solutions that address human error directly (such as ... training) are weaker solutions. Solutions that address the system (such as the workplace climate or culture) are much stronger.*" Similarly, E. Hollnagel's '*Hierarchy of Intervention Effectiveness*' ranks 'Education and Training' as the least effective intervention and systemic interventions (like culture change) as the most effective. Being highly experienced and qualified organisation and culture change professionals, we also know this to be true. A strong intervention eliminates the risk. Our methodology eliminates the risk of unacceptable behaviour being experienced in a workgroup or organisation.)

The delivery of our workgroup culture-shaping program

We could arrange for our culture-shaping, -embedding and -sustaining methodology to be provided through a program of visits to every Parliamentarian's Office and/or through virtual workshops. As you will see from our submission to the DoF Tender, we are prepared to train the Trainers who will visit every Office nationally to additionally provide training in our methodology to every Office. We would provide a support service both to the Trainers as well as to the Office staff and the Parliamentarian and Manager.

We envisage us training the successful Training Organisation's Trainers who will visit the Parliamentarians' Offices in our methodology and also supplying them with materials (handout materials – e.g. on 'Embedding & Sustaining the Culture of Respect') and that the Trainers will present our methodology to each Parliamentarian's Office during their visit.

We would be pleased at any stage to conduct a pilot of our methodology (the culture-shaping/embedding/sustaining program) with any workgroups at any location to demonstrate to the DoF or its representatives (and/or to representatives of the Training service provider) its effectiveness. We would also be pleased to review our culture-shaping workshop materials with the Training Service Provider before we train their Trainers and would welcome and take on board feedback from the Trainers at any time. We are providing in a separate document the results of our research that proved up the effectiveness of our methodology.

We envisage this culture-shaping process (our methodology) will be established in a 1-hour segment of each workshop that the Trainers will facilitate with each Parliamentarian's Office staff. It would be ideal if the Parliamentarian and Manager could participate in this segment of the Training workshop with their staff. However, where they do not participate in a culture-shaping training workshop, the Parliamentarian and/or manager could be separately briefed, either verbally (by phone or in a virtual meeting) or in writing, by our Principal Consultant. This 1-hour briefing will inform them on the methodology, on the science underpinning it and on opportunities for them to enhance their staff's embedding and utilisation of the culture-shaping methodology to establish a safe, bullying- and harassment-free workplace. A one-on-one coaching service will also be available for as long as required to Trainers, Parliamentarians and managers.

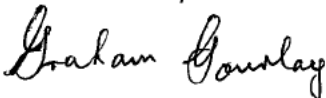
It would also be ideal if the Parliamentarian and the Manager could also participate in the subsequent regular workgroup (Office-wide) reflective conversations about how well the group's vision for its climate is being experienced and to surface an issues or concerns about behaviour.

Our consultants will provide a manual for the culture-shaping (Trainers') workshop and other relevant skilling materials, such as on the power of voicing and on how to have a reflective conversation. Workgroups will be encouraged to explore, discuss and practice these capabilities and their experiences by applying (trailing and using) them at their group meetings. Our facilitators will be available for as long as required to provide advice, support and guidance (coaching) to the Trainers and the Parliamentarians' Office staff, including Parliamentarians.

In conclusion

We are grateful to you and your staff for giving consideration to this submission. We would be pleased to discuss any issues that might arise from that consideration and to explore any options for rolling out the methodology across the Parliamentarians' Offices nationally and for supporting that process for as long as necessary.

Yours sincerely



Graham Gourlay



Gil Sawford



Attachment A

Our Methodology – in depth

The key steps and dynamics – the scientific underpinnings - of our approach to achieving this (proactive, preventative) respectful workplace culture are:

1. Key steps

We ask/engage each workgroup (in this case, each Parliamentarian's Office staff) ...

- (i) in a positive, collaborative climate (we utilise the power of positive psychology), to reflect on and share their experiences of the best workplaces that each member has known and also to share their vision of the characteristics of their ideal workplace climate;
- (ii) we then ask workgroup members to articulate, agree on (we use voting preferences to build a sense of individual and group ownership of the group's list) the group's preferred list of behavioural expectations (ie. their local code of conduct). The agreed list can be expected to be informed by the concurrent workshop training and education session.
- (iii) to explore, discuss and agree whether any action is required to make this workgroup space a safe place for everyone to speak up openly, honestly, respectfully, without fear, on any issue that might arise. (A group can agree to fine-tune or change their list of agreed list of behavioural expectations or code at any time.)
- (iv) to have regular reflective conversation at its group meetings on how things are going in bringing the desired group behaviours to life. It is in these open, honest conversations that group members identify discomforts, concerns, issues, hazards and vulnerabilities, knowing they will be supported by their colleagues in speaking up. They also identify what needs to be done and by whom to address any problem that is surfaced. When group members experience, as a result of speaking up, how their own or a colleague's input made a difference, others in the group will inevitably be more likely to speak up when the need arises.

2. Key dynamics - What's going on through this process?

Through this process the group builds its – and each individual member's - ownership of the workplace culture and exercises its (and their own individual) sense of accountability for achieving and sustaining the desired behaviours, climate, culture.

It can be seen therefore to be an empowering, bottom-up process involving self-regulation and straight-talking. It treats staff as adults and as a result they feel empowered, trusted, respected by the authority figures (Office leaders). Staff are motivated by the trust, respect and accountability – for maintaining a high well-being, high performing climate where everyone can give of their best – that are placed in them through the process. People feel welcome to speak their truth, to speak up, to voice and engage in authentic behaviour.

In the safe, trust-based, group climate that is created each staff member's sense of self-worth, trust and security is confirmed as they grow increasingly confident and trusting in sharing their feelings, openly and honestly, about how they are working together about what they are or have been experiencing.

In this safe, trust-based environment everyone is encouraged and supported to bring all of themselves to work – to give of their best selves, their skills, passions, experience, insights, wisdom, intuition, sense of humour and fun – to the workplace and to supporting their colleagues.

Individuals feel good about themselves – proud to be part of an effective, respected, collaborating, high performing team. People feel like they are valued and that they belong. The group feels good about itself and its work environment. Everyone is committed to – and to play their part to - maintain that.

3. It prevents bullying and harassment

The group process is also effective in preventing negative behaviours because it makes clear to a potential perpetrator that any behaviour that breaches the group's code (behavioural expectations) will be surfaced at the group's regular meeting and addressed by the group, in the first instance*. (*The group may decide to escalate an issue.) Anyone disposed to engage in unacceptable behaviour can be certain such behaviour will be surfaced in the group. They will have observed that the group has created, is maintaining and is utilising a safe space for anyone to speak up about any issue, discomfort or concern. It is recognised in the scientific literature that people engage in (perpetrate) negative, questionable, harmful or unacceptable behaviours because they believe they can and will get away with it. The regular group process – regular reflective conversations – where a group reflects, in a safe setting, on how they are experiencing the workplace, stands in the way of anyone thinking they will get away with unacceptable behaviour of any kind.

***Why our approach works** – The scientific, psycho-dynamic foundations; including the use of positive psychology and an understanding of human factors*

The WLF Desired Workplace Practice program is innovative, preventative and powerful, in that it brings out the best in participants because everyone in the workgroup, team or organisation is involved in articulating the workplace behaviours they want in and also in achieving their ideal work environment. This participation builds a sense of feeling trusted, of ownership, of accountability and of being empowered to ensure that the desired behaviours are being lived, sustained and enhanced continuously. The program is also grounded in theoretical science and research evidence.

It is this strong sense of ownership of and of accountability for the workgroup culture that our process inculcates in every individual, that effectively inoculates the workgroup from experiencing negative, harmful, unacceptable behaviours. This is a preventative approach. (Needless to say, as in all other aspects of life, prevention is the wisest approach to any debilitating, harmful, dangerous or unacceptable activity. Once a person is experiencing such activity, the quality of their life is compromised.)

Through participation in reflective conversations at regular group meetings, group members have opportunities to take responsibility for self-regulating the living out of the desired behaviours and for designing, implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of any changes, improvements or other initiatives associated with bringing those behaviours – their desired culture - to life.

By using those regular opportunities to share their reflections, experiences and ideas the participants become equipped (skilled) and practiced in exercising that responsibility.

Our Program is grounded in and shaped by;

- contemporary understandings of human behaviour, group- or psycho-dynamics, positive psychology, the power of voice, high performing workgroups and organisational change
- our effective, proven participatory (bottom up – not top down) approach to workplace behaviour-shaping
- ensuring individual, workgroup or professional needs are addressed to drive and facilitate continuous strengthening of the high well-being workplace.

Building & sustaining ownership and engagement

- A cornerstone of the program's design is the concept that workgroups need a safe space in which to build and nourish a sense of ownership and pride in behaviour-shaping.
- The process used to build that sense of ownership serves valuable additional purposes:
 - i. It ensures that local workplace practices are regularly surfaced, discussed and prioritised, having been heard by all members, including by the leaders, of the group.
 - ii. It provides regular opportunities for every member of the group to share with others any challenges they may face that could have adverse impacts on staff or clients
 - iii. It is in this psychologically safe space that each workgroup becomes practiced and increasingly effective in creating and maintaining the desired behaviour.
 - iv. It provides regular opportunities for group members to learn, model, practice, and enhance their emotional intelligence skills.

Grounded in science

Our program is also grounded in the relevant fields of the science of human and organization behaviour, social analysis or group dynamics, human relationship-building and maintenance and in extensive doctoral research on approaches to workplace well-being, the prevention of stressful workplace behaviours and threats to productivity, well-being and effective client outcomes.

Grounded in precedent

Our comprehensive search of the world's academic literature revealed only one successful approach to surfacing and sustainably tackling problematic, deep-seated, behavioural challenges in a large, complex organization.

This research showed that the most effective component of the success of the program was the workgroup conversations facilitated by the consultants and the empowerment of the participants to identify, understand and solve challenges and measure and report the effectiveness of changes made.

Based on our own research

Our recently completed, private sector-sponsored research on the effectiveness of our approach to shaping workplace practice proved up the success of our cost-effective methodology in improving

engagement, group psychological safety (trust), collaborative behaviours, emotional intelligence, voicing (speaking up) and wellbeing.

Evaluation is built into the methodology

A baseline survey, a questionnaire, will be completed by all participants at the first workshop and the same questionnaire will be administered at any interval specified by the Department. In our research project, the questionnaire was administered after 3 months, but the Department may prefer to have it administered after 6 months and again after 12 months and again at any preferred interval thereafter.

Key dimensions of workplace culture will be addressed in the survey and in the report on the results – the extend of changes over the elapsed period between surveys - including change in the sense of safety to voice any concerns, the degree of satisfaction with the level of respectful behaviour in the workgroup and the degree of confidence and trust in being supported by the workgroup, the Parliamentarian and the manager if/when concerns are voiced. Other dimensions of interest to the Department such as collaborative behaviours and performance can be included.



Building, Shaping,
Sustaining the
Desired
Workplace Culture

Building, Shaping, Sustaining the Desired Workplace Culture

Creating Ownership and Responsibility

Achieving the work-group's Vision for its culture, its code of conduct, its behavioural expectations

Creating the Framework or Vision for the group's culture



Step 1

The workgroup shares experiences of best and ideal workplace climates, articulates and votes on their desired culture, values and behaviours needed to deliver on their Vision

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Each Group adopts/agrees and takes ownership of bringing the desired culture to life

Using the Framework



Steps 2 - 5

Each Group has regular, facilitated reflective conversations on their progress towards making the desired culture a reality

While continuously improving things – helping each other – refining the expectations

Building, Shaping, Sustaining the Desired Workplace Culture

The WLF Desired Workplace Culture program involves workgroups getting together to create a positive culture, to embed and bring-to-life their agreed values, ground-rules or behavioural expectations to guide team behaviours and to prevent unacceptable behaviours such as bullying and harassment.

The program is innovative and powerful, in that it brings out the best in participants because they articulate the workplace behaviours they want, to enable them to achieve their ideal work environment. This participation builds a sense of feeling trusted, of ownership, of accountability and of being empowered to ensure that the desired behaviours are being lived, sustained and enhanced continuously.

Through participation in reflective conversations at regular group meetings, group members have opportunities to take responsibility for self-regulating the living-out of the desired behaviours and for designing, implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of any changes, improvements or other initiatives associated with bringing them to life.

By using those regular opportunities to share their reflections, experiences and ideas, modelling and adopting skills from each other, the participants become equipped (skilled) and practiced in exercising that responsibility.

Our Program is grounded in and shaped by:

- contemporary understandings of human behaviour and organisational change
- our effective, proven participatory approach to workplace behaviour-shaping
- ensuring individual, workgroup or professional needs are addressed to drive and facilitate continuous improvement

Building & sustaining ownership and engagement

- A cornerstone of the program's design is the concept that workgroups need a safe space in which to build and nourish a sense of ownership and pride in behaviour-shaping
- The process used to build that sense of ownership serves valuable additional purposes:
 - i. It ensures that local workplace practices are regularly surfaced, discussed and prioritised, having been heard by all members, including by the leaders, of the group
 - ii. It provides regular opportunities for every member of the group to share with others any challenges they may face that could have adverse impacts on staff or clients
 - iii. It is in this psychologically safe space that each workgroup becomes practiced and increasingly effective in creating and maintaining the desired behaviours
 - iv. It provides regular opportunities for group members to learn, model, practice, and enhance their emotional intelligence skills

Grounded in science

Our program is also grounded in the relevant fields of the science of human and organization behaviour, relationship-building and maintenance, and in extensive doctoral research on approaches to the prevention of stressful workplace behaviours as well the prevention of threats and harm to people, productivity and effective client service.

Grounded in precedent

Our comprehensive search of the world's academic literature revealed just a single successful approach to surfacing and sustainably tackling problematic, deep-seated, behavioural challenges in a large, complex organization.

This research showed that the most effective component of the success of the program was the workgroup conversations facilitated by the consultants and the empowerment of the participants to identify, understand and solve challenges and measure and report the effectiveness of changes made.

Based on our own research

Our recently completed, private sector-sponsored research on the effectiveness of our approach to shaping workplace culture proved up the success of our cost-effective methodology in improving engagement, group psychological safety, collaborative behaviours, emotional intelligence, voicing (speaking up) and well-being.

Our team

Our design and implementation team comprises highly qualified and experienced consultants, with extensive backgrounds as hands-on managers, coaches and consultants in the fields of organisational behaviour, organisational development, culture-change, executive and team coaching, high performing teams, human potential and group processes.

Our approach meets key requirements:

- It is empowering of individuals and workgroups, thus achieving high levels of engagement, experiential learning, relationship-building, growth, ownership and accountability for delivering high performance
- Continuous improvement is embedded
- It is self-sustaining
- It encourages and facilitates sharing and collaboration and it involves on-going organisational, workgroup and individual capability-building
- It is pro-active and preventative – it prevents bullying and harassment – any negative acts
- The program's effectiveness can be regularly surveyed and reported back to the participants
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of workgroup-sponsored initiatives can become routine
- The importance of voicing (respectfully) in the interests of one's own and one's colleagues' wellbeing is regularly brought to front-of-mind of participants and the skills to voice are learned, modelled and practiced

Optional data collection to inform evaluation

- Every participant in each workshop/workgroup can be invited to anonymously complete an effectiveness survey before the behaviour-shaping process starts and again after the first 6 and every 12 months of their participation in the process
- The consultants can analyse the survey data by group and provide the results to every group member/participant
- The results of the group surveys can be compiled and reported anonymously at a cohort or corporate level

Building and Shaping Desired Workplace Culture

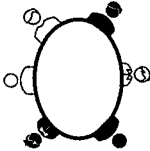
Practically Speaking – Shaping shared cultural norms to drive change and improve productivity

Low cost roll-out across the federal Parliamentarians' Offices nationally

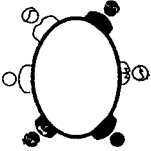
The Trainers who will visit every Parliamentarian's Office will be trained to (also) facilitate a 1-2 hour workshop to equip Parliamentarians' Offices to establish the culture-shaping and sustainability process.

The consultants will be available for guidance and support both to the Trainers and the Offices indefinitely and as required.

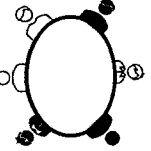
The Process

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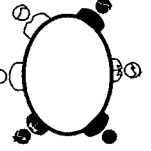
Step 1

A Trainer (from the successful ATM Service Provider) trained in the WLF Desired Workplace Culture program will facilitate a workshop in each Parliamentarian's staff to establish the framework and processes for this program.
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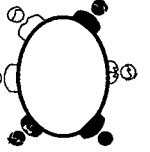
Step 2

One week later the Trainer (or our consultant) will facilitate or oversight the initial reflective conversation among the Parliamentarian's staff. Everyone to complete the initial evaluation survey.
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Step 3

At regular workgroup (Office) meetings held at least fortnightly, the group will engage in an agenda-free, reflective conversation.
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Step 4

The Trainer (or as required, our consultant) will participate (as requested by the group) every 6 weeks for 6 months in the group's reflective conversation.
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Step 5

The groups will continue self-directed reflective conversations at all subsequent meetings. Members will take turns to share and discuss materials relevant to workplace culture, behaviour.



Gil Sawford MBA, MIMC
 Director WLF Consulting

Role – Gil will assist in all aspects of this project and will be a co-facilitator of the workshops and reflective conversations

Gil brings extensive experience in organisation and cultural change projects.

Background

Gil specialises in the strategic match and alignment between an organisation's business direction and its people. He excels at asking the right questions and stimulating others' thinking for continual learning, and his work provides organisations with capable and responsible employees by encouraging them to apply the skills of leadership to the success of the organisation and to their own careers.

Gil is recognised for his long-standing professional reputation in the fields of organisational development and change management. He advises private, community and public-sector organisations on human resources management and organisational development challenges and opportunities, working with both individuals and organisations undergoing change.

Gil is considered by clients and colleagues to be working at the leading edge of his field. His work on the integration of the individual's personal plan with that of the organisation is becoming recognised as a vital missing link in contemporary management understanding and practice.

Gil has recently worked with Hobart City Council on the new community vision and strategic planning project.

Key Expertise	Professional Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and facilitating vision, strategy and planning workshops • Change management and organisational restructuring • Human resource management • Career management • Process consultation • Expertise in coaching for improved performance • Team development that builds organisational cohesion • Building Personal Success processes that increase productivity and motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Business Administration (James Cook University) • Member Institute of Management Consultants



Graham Gourlay
Affiliate WLF Consulting

Role – Graham will assist in all aspects of this project; will be a coach, co-facilitator of workshops and reflective conversations. Graham brings extensive experience in Parliamentarians’ Offices, in culture change and executive and workplace coaching.

Background

Graham was an organisational and workplace culture change consultant and a behavioural, relationships and performance coach for executives, staff and teams at Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, the Australian Taxation Office and other departments – including Parliamentary Departments - in Canberra. Graham has had many years’ experience in the Prime Minister’s Office, as Chief of Staff of an Opposition Leader’s Office and of a Commonwealth Minister’s Office as well as roles in a State Minister’s and a backbencher’s electorate office.

Graham now runs his own organisational consultancy practice (*Run to Work Pty Ltd*) and conducts research on high performing teams and the prevention of harmful (bullying, harassing) behaviour.

Graham’s consulting practice and research interests are grounded in the fields of positive psychology, appreciative enquiry, organisational behaviour, dialogue, emotional and social intelligence and social-analysis (humans in relationship). In practice, he helps workgroups make their members’ lives in organisations more collaborative, engaging and satisfying, for all (both clients and staff) – their workplaces more high performing overall – through the use of positive mood, empowerment, reflective conversation and emotional intelligence-based communications and relationships.

Key Expertise	Professional Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating sustainable, continuously improving, high performing, high engagement, empowered, collaborative, supportive workplaces & teams • Creating values-based workplaces that self-regulate professional practice, compliance with required standards and ensure respectful behaviours • Creating & sustaining the desired workplace culture – psychologically safe, collaborative, respectful – where everyone can contribute their best, feel safe to take on risks/challenges and grow professionally • Strengthening and applying EQ capabilities at work; how to have ‘difficult conversations’; speaking up; practicing authentic behaviour • Creating workplace culture that prevents bullying, any negative behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Public Administration (Management) • Master of Business (Org Change & Consulting) • Grad Cert (Research)



John Chandler

Affiliate WLF Consulting

Role – John will assist in all aspects of this project and will be a co-facilitator of workshops and reflective conversations.

John brings extensive experience in business development, mentoring and coaching.

Background

John has lectured in MBA programs in six different countries and has Co-ordinated MBA Programs at James Cook University and Latrobe University's Graduate School of Management. As a senior manager in the Higher Education sector, he was responsible for managing whole of faculty staff, budgets and resources. In his senior management roles, he has been responsible for turning around poor financial positions through extensive reviewing of expenses and increasing revenue, staff development, workforce reconfiguration and process improvement. John is a highly experienced manager.

John has also worked as a management consultant for over six years that has seen him undertake a number of strategic reviews, having input into strategy design and implementation, marketing and business development activities. John is an excellent business coach and mentor. He is currently a Director on the Board of the Smart Precinct NQ, which is a dedicated to driving innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the Townsville region.

Key Expertise	Professional Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding ability to develop and implement effective business systems • Proven Financial and Resource Management skills • Extensive marketing knowledge and skills • Comprehensive understanding and ability to engage in international business • Proven ability to effectively facilitate change in organisations • High level and confident negotiation and communication skills • Holistic perspective of the business domain and a diverse background • Clarity of thinking, the lucidity of management and a tenacity to build new enterprises • High level team building skills and project management background • Strategic thinker with ability to translate intent into obtainable organisational objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Science • Graduate Diploma of Education • Master of Business Administration • Member – Academy of International Business

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Contact:

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P | 0419 136 087
E | gil.sawford@wlf.com.au
W | wlf.com.au

GPO Box 1083
Hobart Tas 7001

First Floor
160 Collins Street
Hobart Tas 7000



Research project: Exploring the use of positively-framed, reflective conversation to shape the desired workplace culture/climate

[A] Introduction to the research project – its rationale - design

What is this all about? Why was this research undertaken?

Background & context

Practitioners and scholars in leadership, management and organisational circles have become increasingly aware that a workplace culture, having certain characteristics, needs to be created and sustained that is conducive to the organisation's goals being met, while human well-being is nurtured.

It is widely recognised that if you want your organisation or workgroup to be innovative, for example, you need to create and nurture a climate/culture that encourages, supports and rewards innovation. People need to feel – indeed, to know for certain – that it is safe for them to take a risk, to try things and to have their trials fail. Similarly, if you want to prevent bullying and other negative behaviours in your workplace – which regulatory agencies around the world are increasingly demanding of employers - you will need to create a climate/culture that prevents such behaviour. The same applies if you want 'teamwork-behaviour'; 'values-based behaviour', 'collaborative behaviour' or 'respectful behaviour' and even 'high performance', by way of further examples. Having the appropriately conducive culture is crucial to achieving the desired and required organisational ends.

What has been lacking, however, until we undertook this research project is an evidence-base – some science, if you like – that can guide organisations and managers in how to create and sustain the culture they want. How can we shape the culture of a group, of a team or an organisation – systematically, routinely, ourselves (using mainly in-house resources; reasonably cheaply, in other words) – and maintain that shape when we get it? The research project addresses this question.

The research intervention

The research project used an empowering, experiential and learning-oriented intervention at the level of the workgroup, that (potentially) shapes individual, as well as workgroup and organisation-wide capabilities, relationships and behaviours - ie. the climate/culture.

The intervention was predicated on the recognition – widespread in the organisational change profession - that issuing edicts top down and then trying to enforce compliance with those edicts to elicit the desired behaviours is ineffective.

Humans need to feel a sense of ownership both of any change that they are being expected to pursue or adopt and of its implementation, achievement and, in due course, it's up-dating. The intervention built such ownership of the culture in the participating individuals and their workgroup.

The intervention aimed to facilitate, empower and enable the group to create the positive workplace climate or culture it desires; to sustain that climate/culture (the sense of ownership and empowerment are key here) so that the group's and the individuals' goals would be met and continue to be met, efficiently, effectively and with high regard to human needs and well-being. The research measured the effectiveness of the intervention in achieving that outcome.

The research intervention adopted a number of research design elements that have been neglected in the past, but that have been called for more recently by several researchers, particularly by Beirne and Hunter (2013) and other thought leaders in organisational change – namely,

- it intervened at the workgroup or team level
- it involved empowerment to build in the participants a sense of ownership of and commitment to the change and the desired climate/culture
- it attended to managerial politics and the potential for compromise, slippage and inaction, and
- it researched a process by looking in detail at the 'working out of ... programmes' and took a 'more contingent, less determinant' approach to tackling any non-compliant behaviour that is incompatible with the agreed, desired behaviours.

The research project was specifically and centrally concerned with exploring and testing the effectiveness of workgroups engaging in regular, reflective conversations, framed by the behavioural expectations, articulated and agreed on by the group, of the key positive elements of its desired climate/culture, to;

- (i) make that climate/culture a reality, while also
- (ii) maintaining the desired climate/culture and
- (iii) constantly monitoring and, as necessary, refreshing the vision for the desired climate/culture to keep it aligned with changing business realities.

The thinking being tested in the research therefore was: If a workgroup has regular opportunities to practice, to acquire (through dialogical, experiential learning), to develop, fine-tune and apply their capabilities to reflect on and safely talk about any concerns about their agreed expectations being not met, will the group be effective in shaping and improving the climate/culture, well-being and performance of the group?

Where does the idea come from? Why explore this positively-framed, reflective conversation approach to culture-shaping?

The approach involved the workgroup first articulating and agreeing on the climate/culture that it wants to have and then self-regulating its enactment through regular, honest, respectful dialogue in a safe 'container' (a meeting).

The development of and confidence to test this approach emerged from:

- The researcher's experience of the potential for transformational growth and improvements in health, well-being and performance in individuals and in groups from engaging in psychodynamic group processes - such as reflection, dialogue, authentic behaviours, straight talk and the enhancement of emotional intelligence –

through many years of postgraduate study and practice as an organisational consultant and executive and team coach.

- A large US agency faced a major problem of ‘negative acts’ – bullying behaviour. It applied considerable resources to support its staff, in their workgroups, to address the problem. It was a corporate goal to reduce and eliminate bullying. The associated empowerment of the staff and the building up of both a sense of ownership of the problem and of the solutions proved highly effective. Reflecting on what was the key to the success of this large-scale, resource-intensive, action research project, participants and researchers jointly concluded that it was the nature of the conversations held in the empowered groups that made all the difference and achieved the positive results.
- There is practitioner experience locally that is aligned with that US outcome. The experience here is that when workgroups have agreed, in a positive mindset, on their behavioural expectations of each other – i.e. of the climate elements they want to experience – and they have regular opportunities to, are empowered to and equipped (skilled, coached, practiced) to monitor and self-regulate the maintenance of that climate, they have higher levels of collaboration, performance and well-being.
- There is also considerable theoretical underpinning of these experiences and this approach to climate/culture-shaping. It is outlined in Attachment A.

The conversation-based, empowered group process that was the vehicle for the climate/culture-shaping work undertaken through the intervention facilitates, develops and encourages collaborative behaviours. Collaboration is the key to high performance in groups and particularly, to innovation and the prevention of negative behaviours. (If people are collaborating, they cannot be bullying each other.) It also has a significant and positive impact on well-being. So the approach we explored potentially has widespread importance for driving innovation, for preventing bullying and for achieving high levels of team performance. These are central concerns of governments and employers everywhere.

Wilderom concluded *The Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate* (2011) by stating ‘...new research needs to focus on the pertinent question: *How do collective work entities develop a set of shared norms, values, assumptions, expectations, and so forth that emphasize and model (more) positive ways of working.*’ Our research project was a direct response to Wilderom’s call.

Some other key facets of this approach to climate/culture-shaping that are being explored

The importance of having a safe space and (of using it) to speak up

It has been found in various organisational settings and is supported by theoretical work, that it is possible to create and sustain the climate/culture that is desired, if a safe, collaborative work environment is created and maintained.

In such a setting, participants feel safe to speak up about any concerns they might have, at any time, such as about the way they are experiencing the culture/climate, individual or group behaviours, etc. They have learned, through experience in this setting, to trust their colleagues and they know they will be listened to respectfully, heard and

supported by others in the workgroup when their concerns are brought to the attention of the workgroup and will be respectfully, compassionately addressed by the group.

The psychologically safe workgroup where members can have all of the conversations that they need to have and which the research intervention aims to create, operates like an empowered, self-regulating mechanism to enable group members to collaborate in maintaining the desired culture

More conversation – speaking up - is healthy

A fundamental precept of healthy, collaborative, human relationships is the desirability of *'having all the conversations one needs to have'*. (Scholars of organisational culture may have heard the corollary – that *'the culture of an organisation is the sum of all of the conversations that people needed to have, but did not have!'*)

The approach in the research intervention was aligned with these precepts as it enabled, facilitated and encouraged more conversation among the workgroup members bearing on the achievement, nurturing and sustaining of the desired culture/climate and also on the group's work or performance. (The group was fully conscious that it was responsible for these things – its culture and its performance.)

There is, moreover, a double loop learning dynamic and/or parallel process at work which reinforces the power of that mechanism in creating and maintaining the desired culture/climate. As the workgroup improves at its 'group process', it becomes more trusting and collaborative. Trust and collaboration are the essence of innovation, entrepreneurship and high performing groups. (Moreover, as collaboration is the opposite of aggression, the collaboration chokes out aggression and negative acts associated with it.¹)

[B] Results of the initial round of case studies

The research project

This research project was undertaken with private sector sponsorship and support through 2017. (It was originally designed to be an 'Industry Partnership' [REDACTED])

The management of 8 disparate workgroups across Tasmania agreed to support the project which involved an intervention where a positive framework was created in which each group could hold regular reflective conversations for 20-30 minute on 6 occasions over 3 months.

¹ *'We came to see that the creation and maintenance of collaborative social space improved our interpersonal behaviour. In particular, it changed the very nature and quality of the conversations that we were having within and between the teams. We suddenly (if belatedly) realized that aggression and collaboration are antithetical concepts (Yorks et al. 2007, pp. 362-365).'*

Changes in the workgroup culture were measured by a survey conducted both before and after the intervention. The survey measured 5 mediating variables (team psychological safety, workgroup emotional intelligence, voice climate, perceived team support, collaborative climate) and 6 outcome variables (work engagement/well-being, team incivility climate, levels of workplace incivility and of negative acts and work performance (for which 2 measures were used)).

Results

- The data from the two surveys suggests that whatever happened in the workgroups between the surveys – i.e. while the intervention (the reflective conversations) was taking place – appears, overall, to be associated with significant change and improvements in the workgroup climate.
- Specifically, 77% (68 of the total of 88) of the workplace climate measures improved between the surveys across the 8 workgroups. Increases in measures of the order of 15% - 20% over the 3 months were not unusual.
- There was a net positive result across all 11 variables in every one of the 8 groups. However, the extent of the improvement or positive climate change varied considerably between the groups. Two groups saw improvement in all 11 variables and amassed a total change (improvement) of 139% and 98% respectively over the 11 variables – an average improvement per variable of 12.6% and 8.9%.
- For the 8 groups, the average of the total (net) improvements (positive change overall) across all 11 variables, over the 3 months of the intervention, was 58%.
- Only 9 (of the 88) measures deteriorated across 6 of the groups.
- For the improvements to be maintained, the practice of having some reflective conversation regularly, needs to be continued.

Conclusion

This project points to the potential effectiveness of positively-framed, reflective group conversations in shaping and sustaining desired, agreed workplace climates and cultures.

Cost of this approach: Apart from the opportunity cost (in terms of workers' absence from their front-line work while attending a meeting) of a workgroup having such a conversation regularly – say, for 20-30 minutes once a week or a fortnight – and any initial short-term consultancy required to set up the framing and conduct of the reflective conversations (i.e. helping the group to identify, own and discuss compliance with their agreed behavioural expectations), the process can be delivered *in-house* by an interested volunteer group member. It is therefore considered to be a very low-cost, (largely) self-help and self-sustaining approach to workplace climate/culture-shaping.

Theoretical underpinnings & values of the conversation-based approach to workplace climate/culture-shaping

[A] Theoretical basis

What is the theoretical basis for this intervention project's approach to climate- and culture-shaping?

The climate/culture-shaping intervention outlined here is grounded in theory and professional practice from the fields of action research, authentic leadership, process consulting, behavioural and workplace coaching, culture change, group process facilitation, high performance teams, organisational development; social, experiential and emotional learning; change and learning, psychology (particularly positive psychology and psychodynamics/social analysis) and draws on a raft of specific theories and concepts including bounded emotionality, dialogue, emotional intelligence, experiential skilling and capability development, group processes, negotiating emotional boundaries, Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB), Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS), organisational learning, perceived organisational/colleague/group /supervisor support, Psychological Safety Climate, straight talk, teamwork behaviours, voice, reflective conversation and trust.

Transformative cooperation

Many of the above fields, topics and concepts drawn on in shaping this intervention are encompassed by the concept of '*Transformative cooperation*'. This concept was introduced by Sekerka and Fredrickson (2008) to describe a type of deep change that stems from a positive and authentic psychological perspective and effectively involves the use of positive emotions to achieve dynamic organisational change. The intervention (ie. the research project) can be considered to be grounded in the concept and theory of transformative cooperation.

Transformative cooperation involves seeding a positive emotional climate to drive empowered cultural and organisational change. It is based on the 'broaden-and-build theory' of positive emotions (Fredrickson 1998, 2001, 2009) which relates to the process whereby positive emotional climates support deep change within individuals, organisations and communities. It works at all levels, helping to foster healthy relationships.

Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka and Fredrickson (2011) explain the deeper dynamics involved in transformative cooperation as involving the fostering of positive emotions in a group using some form of strength-based (positive) inquiry to create a positive emotional climate, which, in turn, incubates and makes manifest the benefits of broaden-and-build effects of positive emotions.

This aligns with thinking, dominant in the field of organisational change management, which recognises the importance of creating and nurturing a positive atmosphere for fostering change. The rationale for this, it is argued, is that in positive environments, peoples' emotions and cognitions will be aligned and when people feel good about what they are

doing, they are more likely to cooperate and engage in action – which is a precursor for buy-in or building a sense of ownership of a change.

The solution is to be found in the process!

The research intervention we are considering here is, therefore, grounded in and reflective of the same theoretical constructs and dynamics as transformative cooperation and change management.

Both paradigms embrace the idea that whatever the objective or intent of the change might be, the solution lies not in – and should not be about - correcting problems, but rather, is better found in ‘a deliberate and continuous effort of originality towards the creation of new forms of organising that provide shared value and mutual benefits for all involved’. The solution – the delivery of a change or a changed climate/culture - is to be found in the process, is the thinking.

Exclusively top-down approaches or solutions are not effective

Because it is generative, transformative cooperation – indeed, like any organisational or culture change - cannot be declared, ordered, or implemented via top-down mandate. Transformative cooperation – again, like all change, including organisational culture change - should be a cooperative effort, with contributions coming from - and ownership emerging from - both bottom-up and top-down directions.

Positive emotions (psychology) are key

- Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka and Fredrickson (2011) suggest that positive emotions stem from transformative cooperation in the workplace and they then broaden-and-build organisational identification and relational strength, thereby expanding individuals and, eventually, the entire organisation. In this way and in essence, transformative cooperation creates a virtuous cycle of positive psychology that nurtures deep change.
- The challenge of learning to create and leverage a climate of positivity is important in both the research and the interventions in this area. Positive work environments, Hartel and Ashkanasy argue [in Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson (2000, p. 88)] have ‘*an emotional climate that provides the emotional experiences necessary for human flourishing.*’
- Edgar Schein pinpointed the need for researchers, particularly those involved in ‘*industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology*’ (Kimmel 2009, p. 170) (as we are here), to be so immersed in group dynamics that they are able to work with behaviours; ‘*the growing concern with positive psychology and positive climates and cultures only begins to make sense if we can specify just what kind of behaviour we are looking for that can be defined as ‘positive’.*’
- Wilderom recognises that: ‘*... new, viable directions and higher productivity levels could be unleashed by pushing more explicitly for positively cultured work settings.*’
- Moreover, it has been reported that positive work environments ‘*are fundamental to organisational members’ ability to perform to their full potential*’ (McKeown, Bryant & Raeder 2009).

Teamwork behaviours

The intervention is facilitating and supporting collaborative or teamwork behaviours and interactions that are described and explained by Sheng, Tian and Chen (2010) in the following terms:

'... According to the findings of several researchers, teamwork can lead to better performance for organizations, such as the enhancement of productivity in the workplace, improvement of service quality, greater satisfaction of employees with jobs, less absence, and reduced turnover rate. ... Marks et al. (2001) found that the success of teams in accomplishing their goals is related not only to the members' talents and their effective resources, but is also associated with their interactions, as team interactions are based on cognition, language, and the members' interdependency. The input is transformed into output in order to fulfill the goals of the teams. In addition, team interactions include the members' behavior, cognition, and affection (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005). According to Rousseau, Aubé, and Savoie (2006), an individual's inner cognition (inclinations and shared mental model) and feelings (sense of belonging) would certainly be transformed into the behaviors, which would influence the final output of the teams. Rousseau et al. called the process of team interactions "teamwork behaviors".'

[B] Values shaping the intervention

This intervention models and supports the values of respecting people, building intra-group trust and support, participation by and the empowerment of stakeholders and trusting a group to sustainably shape its culture through self-regulation.

The intervention de-emphasises the use of hierarchical authority (power) to effect compliance (control) and shape culture and change. Its design and approach recognises the widespread and demonstrated ineffectiveness of reliance on top down corporate directives to mandate that there will be no bullying, backed up with threats and punishments.

The intervention could also be described as organic, emergent, adaptable and non-directive in that awareness of, skilling in and practice of the various topics are not pre-planned but they are focussed on and engaged with when relevant to the group's conversation. In practice, therefore, after the group norms are established, the precise nature of the intervention from week to week will reflect what is going on in the workgroup and which of the professional practices and/or concepts are relevant.

[C] Exploring a (possibly serendipitous) by-product of this approach: Are high performance workgroups created and sustained by this intervention?

The interpersonal dynamics associated with group processes (such as those involved in constructive communication climates; negotiating emotional boundaries; authentic conversations, interactions and relationships at work) - to which I apply the umbrella label

'*teamwork behaviours*' (Morgan Jr, Salas & Glickman 1993; Rousseau, Aubé & Savoie 2006) - not only prevent destructive communications, dysfunctional relationships, organisational processes and outcomes, but also create high performance, at the individual, group and organisational levels, along with high levels of trust, staff retention, health and well-being, engagement, discretionary effort, professional and personal satisfaction and growth and lower levels of intention to leave (turnover).

In striving to make its communications and relationships more collaborative, respectful and human - and more emotion-centred - the workgroup is developing *teamwork behaviours* and is also effectively transforming itself into a high performance workgroup.

It can be argued – there is considerable theory (see reference to Hays' work below, for example) and reported data in support, but it remains to be tested - that the intervention amounts to equipping a group to become a *high performance team*. Many of the elements of the intervention we are teasing out here are well-established elements of what is required to produce or be a high performing team (Hays 2004).

Hays specified the following characteristics of high performance teams. Many are also characteristic of the climate that is created through the intervention.

The behaviours of high performance teams identified by Hays (2004), include:

- The capacity to generate stands –
 - Ability and willingness to commit (take a stand) to a goal, value, or level of performance or achievement that is beyond 'business as usual'.
 - There is always one or more core stand(s) driving team behaviour.
- Straight talk –
 - Open, honest and timely communication about team performance and effectiveness, including dialogue, debate and feedback.
 - Team members are direct with one another even when it is 'difficult' to be so
 - They are able and willing to give as well as receive feedback.
- Alignment –
 - Intellectual and behavioural agreement on goals, strategies, and processes for achieving them.
 - Team members work together effectively.
 - Team members work through differences and jointly prioritise tasks.
- Resourcefulness and Possibility
 - Invention, innovation and 'seeing outside the box'. Acceptance of new and different. Creative approaches.
 - Team members do not rule out 'half baked' ideas or rely on tried and true solutions or methods.
- Accountability and Responsibility
 - Team (shared) ownership and responsibility, while individual members know what they must do.
 - Team members hold one another accountable.
- Decisive, Coordinated Action
 - Team possesses and uses skills and tools to coordinate and track work.
 - Everyone knows what is required, by whom, when and how.
 - Work/activity is highly visible.
 - There is little time wasted moving from 'talk' to action.

- Accomplishment and Celebration
 - There is a continuous sense of progress and achievement.
 - Team members create opportunities for celebrating success and achievement.
 - Team does not wait until huge projects are finished to celebrate or acknowledge what they have done so far.
- Effectiveness in Breakdowns
 - Team turns breakdowns into breakthroughs.
 - Team members learn from successes and failures.
 - They possess the skills and employ methods to convert conflict and problems into solutions.
 - Team members are quick to recognise and 'call' (name) breakdowns and to initiate an intervention.
- Mutual Support and Coaching
 - The team has a dedicated learning and improvement agenda.
 - Performance improvement and development plans are a matter for the team, at least in part, but not exclusively [hidden] agreements between a manager and an employee.
 - Team members know what needs to be done and have a plan for doing it.
 - Team members ask for and volunteer help.
 - They help one another achieve success.

Indeed, the researcher has long been struck by the extensive overlap between many of the processes, climate and behaviours associated with the theories underpinning this intervention and the processes, climate and behaviours associated with high performance. If these processes, climate and behaviours not only effectively shape (deliver) particular, desired, workplace climates, but as a by-product, also create high performing teams, we want to know about that. So the intervention, as a by-product, is exploring whether that possible insight (theory?) is backed up by the results.

The intervention therefore also tests whether participating workgroups become a high performing team.

Graham Gourlay

31 January 2018