How to manage difficult people (part 3)

KEY WORDS
- Complainer
- Difficult people
- Emotional intelligence
- Hostile
- Negativist
- Silent type

One of the holy grails of management is gaining the ability to lead people who have different personalities and dispositions towards work and in their interactions with other people. We considered, in the last two papers in this series, how the manager needs to certain they are not the cause of conflict and problems within their team before they set out to tackle any issues which may be present. Here we consider how a manager might turn motivations to the advantage of the team.

PETER ELLIS
Independent Nursing and Health Care Consultant, Writer and Educator

In the last paper in this series we identified some of the difficult to manage personality types a manager might encounter. We also considered some of the issues which might contribute to the motivations for the behaviours displayed by difficult to manage people and a little of how the manager might identify what type of difficult behaviour they are facing. In this the third paper in this mini-series, we will consider how a manager might, through understanding of the personality type and personal motivations, and by applying some emotional intelligence, turn the motivations to the advantage of the team.

TURNING DIFFICULTIES TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Emotional intelligence is often cited as among the most important skills a healthcare leader can possess (Mansel and Einion, 2019). At its most basic emotional intelligence enables the leader to understand both their own, and their team's, emotional responses to situations and use this understanding in the way in that they approach and talk to others.

If we consider what might be motivating individuals we have identified as difficult to manage and their emotional responses to work and work situations, then we stand a chance of turning this knowledge into the means of managing their contribution to the team in an effective manner. If we consider each of Lilley's (2006) difficult to manage personality types one at and time, while thinking about what motivates the difficult behaviour, we can start to identify how this might be turned to the advantage of the team.

Some of these solutions might at face value appear superficial, counterintuitive or even difficult to contemplate, but if we work through them, we will start to see how the solutions are about the contribution difficult to manage people make to the team, which is, by definition, made up of people with a variety of different dispositions and skill sets (Belbin, 2016). It is inherent on good health and social care managers that they value the contributions that different people bring to their teams and to the care of the people we serve.

Hostile types these people often have a need to feel involved and important to the team. This means they can be focussed and single minded in getting a job done. This might be valuable where a job is important but difficult to achieve. Give them the role and allow them to feel important. Don't forge, however, to tell them how important they are from time to time, but don't allow them to be hostile. It is difficult to be hostile to someone who you see as supporting you and promoting your interests.

Complainers are people who very often have a good vision of how things might be in the ideal world, but do not feel empowered to achieve this. They frequently know what needs to be achieved and how this might be done, but do not do it because they feel constrained by their role, the people about them or the organisation. Delegating

the power to achieve a goal to them has two interrelated advantages, one it gets the job done and two, if they are involved and leading on the task, they have nothing left to complain about.

Silent types may be quiet because they lack the self-confidence and self-esteem to push themselves forward. Finding the means to give them roles in which they can achieve goals, and for which you can praise them, enables silent types to grow and develop. Giving them praise and raising their self-esteem, creates a bond of trust and enables them to become useful team members who, given time, will become supporters of the leader who has enabled them to develop.

The super agreeable personality wants to fit in and wants to get praise. They tend not to understand the need to undertake work to get praise. They will agree to what you say, agree to do something, and then not do it. So managing them is a matter of setting small tasks that they will achieve and then providing the praise they require. Over time the tasks that they can receive praise for need to become bigger and more complex, so that they develop to the state where they only get the praise they crave for doing the jobs the manager needs them to do. Where they don't achieve targets, they should not receive praise.

The negativist we saw how the negativists often have deep seated values which drive their negativity towards things they don't understand or where they believe a situation does not match with their values. When they are engaged and believe in something they are tenacious and will complete tasks to a high standard, in a consistent manner. The leader therefore needs to understand what makes them tick, sell a task or a situation in terms of its values and leave the negativist to it.

The know all needs to be valued for their knowledge, which in many cases they have. The wise leader or manager will put this knowledge to work for the benefit of the team, perhaps sending them off to find out about things that need some further explanation. If they like to be seen as the expert, use their expertise where it is genuine and take the time to acknowledge their contribution to the team. Remember the team leader is the conductor of the team, it is their role to know the abilities of the team, not to know everything, so developing people into these expert roles serves the team and the team leader well.

The ditherer there are two types of ditherers, those who are perfectionists and those who can't communicate. If someone is a perfectionist, set them tasks which involve perfection. If someone struggles to communicate, allow them to work alone or alongside a person who compliments their strengths and who can communicate well. Both types of ditherers need deadlines and need their actions reinforcing, clearly the perfectionist needs to know they have achieved perfection, while the poor communicator just needs positive reinforcement.

Fundamental to this enabling approach to the management of people identified as difficult to manage, is the need for the manager to value all their team members and to ensure that they know they are valued and cared about. Valuing staff and demonstrating care towards them and their needs, authentic leadership, is one of the facets of building trust (Wong and Giallonardo, 2013) and trust contributes towards improved job-related behaviours and quality improvements (Anand et al, 2012).

For some managers, this approach will be hard to understand because their natural response to difficult to manage people is to tell them to get on with their jobs. This approach will of course work with some people, but fundamentally shows a lack of emotional intelligence and in the medium to long-term does not solve the problem. Failing to address difficult to manage people on a case-by-case basis is likely to cause damage to the team and will impact retention, all-to-often of the more straight-forward to manage team members. It might also serve to allow the innate talents and abilities present in the difficult to manage members of the team to go to waste increasing the workload on other team members.

BAD BEHAVIOUR

This paper has suggested so far that staff often have little control over their difficult to manage behaviours, and to some extent this is true. There are however other occasions where a leader or manager needs to manage the behaviour of a staff member, or staff members, which is plain bad, incompetent or displays a lack of capability.

Approaching the management of these sorts of behaviours is a completely different thing and requires the application of different skill sets.

Bad, lazy or destructive behaviours in the workplace, as elsewhere, are inexcusable and should not be tolerated. Where such behaviours are not dealt with workplaces can become toxic, which does not serve any benefit to anyone. It is important therefore that managers are clear about when they are dealing with difficult to manage people and when they are managing bad behaviours.

CONCLUSION

This paper has revisited some of the difficult to manage personality types which might exist in a healthcare team. It has identified some strategies that may be used to help make the best use of the various personality types and values that drive difficult to manage behaviours. We have identified that, by using some of these strategies, the manager can use some of the traits of the difficult to manage person for the benefit of the team. We have identified, although not explored here, that a key facet of this ability is for the manager to develop their emotional intelligence as it applies to the management of their team.

We have identified that as well as difficult to manage people being the way they are because of their personality types and the values they hold, there are situations and poor behaviours which people have some control over, and which require a different approach to their management. We will consider issues like conflict management and negotiation as well as competency management in subsequent papers in this series. WUK

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Keep moving
Incontinence and increased moisture
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give information

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