

eleos

KNOWLEDGE HUB

RESOURCE

Looking at the whole picture.

Reviewing a leadership situation in a psychologically informed way.

Purpose

When something isn't working, leaders often have to respond quickly. The risk is that the first explanation for what we are seeing becomes the basis for what we do next.

This resource helps you slow that process down just enough to build a better picture.

Use this resource when:

Choose one real situation involving an individual, a relationship or a team. It might involve performance, behaviour, conflict, withdrawal, pressure, change or simply something that does not seem to be working as it usually does.

You're not trying to diagnose the person or explain everything. You're trying to understand enough of the situation to make a better-informed leadership decision.

1 Start with what you actually know.

Describe what's happened without explaining why you think it's happened.

- **What have you actually seen, heard or been told?**
- **What has changed?**
- **When did you first notice it?**
- **Is this something that's happened once, or is there a pattern?**

  Now look at the explanation you've been giving it.

- **What have you assumed this means?**

  "They missed two deadlines" is an observation.
  "They don't care about work" is an interpretation.

Your interpretation may eventually be right.

The important thing is knowing which is which.

What you see is information. It isn't always the explanation.

2 Look at the whole picture.

Now consider the situation from four different positions.

THE PERSON

What do you know about how this person is currently experiencing the situation?

Has anything changed for them?

What strengths, pressures, needs or circumstances may be relevant?

What don't you know yet?

THE WORK

What is the work asking of them?

Consider the demands of the workload, complexity, competing priorities, role clarity, autonomy, change and whether expectations are realistically achievable.

Has something about the work changed?

THE ENVIRONMENT

What's happening around the person?

Consider relationships, team dynamics, culture, uncertainty, organisational change, resources and what happens when people raise difficulties or make mistakes.

Is the environment helping the situation, contributing to it, or both?

YOUR LEADERSHIP

What have you communicated, asked for or assumed?

How have you responded so far?

Could anything about your approach, expectations, communication or decison making be influencing what's happening?

What might the person understand your behaviour to mean?

3 Now look again.

Return to the situation you started with.

Does it look exactly the same now?

You may still reach the same conclusion. The purpose of looking more widely is not to find a different explanation for the sake of it. It is to test whether your initial explanation is sufficient.

Ask:

What seems most important now?

What am I more certain about?

Is there something I need to understand before acting?

Is there something I've been treating as an individual problem that is actually being influenced by the work or environment?

Is there something I've been trying to understand that simply needs to be addressed?

4 What does the situation need from you?

Psychologically informed leadership is not only about understanding. Eventually, leaders have to act. Having looked at the whole picture, consider what the situation now needs.

UNDERSTAND

There is something important you still do not know.

What conversation or information would help you understand it better?

CHANGE

Something about the work, environment or way the situation is being managed needs to be different.

What is within your influence to change?

SUPPORT

The expectation may remain, but somebody needs additional support to meet it or manage what is being asked of them.

What support is appropriate within your role?

ADDRESS

Something needs to be named, challenged or managed directly.

What needs to be clearer about expectations, behaviour, boundaries or accountability?

More than one may apply.

The purpose is not to choose the most supportive response. It is to choose the response that best fits what you now understand about the situation.

Before you move on.

Consider the following things:

- What did I observe, and what did I assume?
- What have I learned by looking at the person, the work and the environment rather than the behaviour alone?
- What effect might my own leadership be having?
- What sits within my responsibility as the leader?
- What does this situation now need me to understand, change, support or address?
- What do I understand now that I didn't understand when I first looked?

The difference between these positions is the value of taking a psychologically informed approach.

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Insight that makes a difference.

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