**ASSIGNMENT 1: EFFECTIVE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CYCLE: A LEADER IMPROVING BELONGING IN A TEAM**

Practitioner: [name redacted]

Date: 7 June 2023

Part 1: Brief Background and Context

Intention

As leader of a client-facing team whose members work independently of each other I wanted to ensure a sense of belonging, which is vital to a consistent quality of client service.

Motivation

* To ensure the various interdependencies work smoothly minimising the potential of clients’ experiences to be undermined.

My Values and Principles

Drawing on Schwartz’ (2012) thinking, my values include:

* Benevolence – being concerned about the welfare of others, both staff and clients
* Security – seeking safety and harmony within the team
* Self-direction – encouraging team members to be self-motivated and exhibit freedom of thought and action.

Professional Aspiration

* To be a leader who ensures colleagues experience being part of a connected team in the service of clients.

Outcome

That team meetings are purposeful in supporting the team to do their work.

Indicators of a Successful Outcome

* + Team members are able to express their honest views about an improved sense of belonging.
  + Feedback from team members about the conduct of meetings is positive.
  + Client feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with our service.

Plan

**Table A1.1** Brief outline of plan

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What will happen?** | **When will it happen?** | | **What resources are required?** | | **Who can provide support?** | |
| I will explore the best ways to achieve belonging in a team | January 2023 | | Articles, books, podcasts, conversations with colleagues | | My line manager Trusted team leaders | |
| I will devise a new team meeting agenda to generate thinking, participation and emotional connection | January 2023 | | Revised standing agenda | | My line manager Trusted team leaders | |
| I will trial the new team meeting format focusing on team members’ views of identity  and belonging, and their thoughts about how these can be strengthened | February 2023 | | VIA Strengths cards | | Team members | |
| I will create time in weekly team meetings to share how people are feeling about the work before starting on the business agenda | | February 2023 | | Allocated time | | Team members |
| I will re-orientate the team meeting as a collaborative and creative idea- generating forum | | January to April | | Thinking Environment principles & practices | | Team members |
| I will designate a team meeting as a vehicle for reviewing progress towards the outcome | | June 2023 | | None | | Team members |

As part of the planning process, I undertook an ethical review and an Equality Impact Assessment. The latter took into account the different levels of experience and expertise, and the diverse composition of the team in terms of ethnic origin and gender. I was determined not to make any assumptions about individuals and wanted to work with colleagues to find ways to develop stronger connections across the team. My ethical review included links to these considerations in that I was keen to be alert to the cultural sensitivities discussions about belonging might invoke. In addition I revisited the ethical standards in our professional field to remind myself of these expectations.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: If team meetings allow space for colleagues to express how they are feeling currently about their work, they will be able to offload the stress they experience and not allow this to interfere with their client relationships.

Hypothesis 2: If I encourage the establishment of a ‘thinking environment’ (Kline, 2002), in meetings, then opportunities will be created for team members to explore and influence how they work, become more engaged and generate ideas for improving the client experience.

Experimentation

What Worked Well

* + The engagement of some team members with the discussion about the three key components of belonging: comfort, connection and contribution (Deloitte, 2020).
  + My use of the Values-in-Action (VIA) Strengths cards to identify individual and

collective strengths.

* + My introduction of a ‘thinking environment’ to explore work-related topics in depth.

What Worked Less Well

* + Some team members were reluctant to discuss belonging.
  + Team members were uncomfortable sharing their emotions.

Results

Team members:

* + Began to share their emotions and the impact on their work (Hypothesis 1 supported)
  + Became convinced of the need to shift to a more collaborative culture

(Hypothesis 2 supported).

Part 2: Reflections and Learning

Appraisal

Overall, this reflective practice cycle was successful. While it has taken much longer to achieve the desired outcome than I originally envisaged my intended outcome was achieved.

Desired Outcome for the Team and Clients

The sense of belonging in the team has strengthened. This has been demonstrated through:

* + Increased engagement by all team members in meetings – with people feeling able to raise potentially sensitive issues related, for example to knowledge backgrounds, race, gender and neurotype
  + A team culture that is beginning to embody continual creative ideas generation

for ways to improve our service

* + An enhanced collective pride in the team’s achievements.

Our clients are noticing a difference too. Our latest client satisfaction survey shows significantly improved results and team members are actively seeking verbal feed- back from clients in their interactions.

Colleagues we interact with in our organisation have also commented on the improved effectiveness and cohesion of our team.

My Intention

My intention, as leader of the team, was to create the conditions that would enable team members to have a strong and genuine sense of belonging. I believe I achieved this intention and have a great deal of satisfaction that the team now sees a more collaborative approach as the norm.

My Learning and Reflections

My Motivation

I was very motivated by my original intention. In setting my intention I confirmed to myself that people finding meaning and a strong connection to their work is extremely important to me. This also underlined how important it is for me to feel my own contribution is meaningful and purposeful. I feel my intention was very closely aligned to my values.

My learning preference is strongly reflective and my MBTI (Rogers, 2007) type (INFJ) means I approach work-related issues in a thoughtful, people-oriented way. I have a tendency to need time and space to think things through before making a response. I noticed that I was not responsive enough in-the-moment in some team meetings to work with the expressed concerns of some team members about revealing sensitive information about themselves. Emotionally, the experience was a bit of a rollercoaster – I sometimes felt frustrated by the lack of progress, while at other times exhilarated by the significant personal shifts I could see happening across the team, with corresponding impacts on my motivation.

My Outcome

I over-estimated how straightforward it would be to achieve my desired outcome. While I had anticipated some reluctance on the part of the team, I underestimated how long it would take for them to see the benefits I could see.

With hindsight my outcome was rather ambitious, particularly in the timescale I envisaged, and it might have been better to break this down into more manageable ‘chunks’. For example, I could have focused on one of the factors affecting belonging rather than all three at once. On the other hand, those factors are interrelated and a more holistic approach replicated reality more accurately.

My Plan

As stated above I think my plan may have been ambitious – certainly in terms of timescale. Some aspects of the plan worked well. For example, I was able to initiate a discussion with the team about belonging, albeit with some important setbacks primarily related to a reluctance of some colleagues to engage fully.

I have learnt that I can be tenacious and determined in the face of opposition and by persevering with a strong values-based intention I can achieve outcomes. I noticed with time to stand back and engage in further reflection, I could return to the fray with a revised approach, which would prove fruitful. For example, switching the focus on the strengths activity to begin with the whole team’s capabilities rather than those of individuals, created the conditions for the latter to then be explored.

I learnt that my top three Values-in-Action (VIA) Strengths are creativity/adaptability, honesty/authenticity and appreciation of beauty/admiration. I was able to deploy these strengths to create openness and find a variety of interesting ways to encourage the team to engage.

The challenges I encountered from some members of the team about the risks related to them revealing their views and opinions created an ethical dilemma for me. My ethical review alerted me to the extent to which we can expect team members to be fully authentic in bringing their whole selves to work. I began to wonder to what extent workplaces and leaders can really expect colleagues to ‘give their all’ to the work. There is an expectation that we bring all of ourselves authentically to our roles – but I noticed my own personal discomfort and limits with opening up about my values and beliefs. I think recognising this in myself helped me be realis- tic about how much I could expect team members to engage more openly and my genuine honesty about this created the conditions that allowed others to be in control of what they revealed.

I learnt that I am able to work sensitively and with integrity, which was commented on positively by several members of the team. I discovered that I am a good listener, which I now realise is an important skill for creating strong working relationships. In line with my MBTI type I am not comfortable being forthright with constructive criticism of others. In a more open and collaborative team culture I will need to develop this ability as another way in to handling resistance. As an INFJ I also need to be alert to the possibility that I may come across as knowing what’s best for people and that I can have a tendency towards perfectionism. This may distort my opinion of others’ performance and further exacerbate a slow transition from reflection to action.

Further, the Equality Impact Assessment I undertook as part of my planning underlined the importance of taking steps to make sure everyone, regardless of background, can express their views and be properly heard in order that they can contribute to improving communication and client experiences. I work with a diverse team serving a very diverse population. My experiments confirmed to me that the team’s diversity is a rich source of experience and learning that enables us to respond effectively to the wide range of needs and aspirations in the community. l discovered that a member of our team, who is always extremely active, is neuro- divergent and I learnt ways of adapting my approach (by ensuring all four learning styles are always in play) so as not to disadvantage them in encouraging a more reflective approach to team working.

If I was doing this again I would break down the outcome into stages and allow more time for implementation. On the one hand my preference for reflection can mean I hold back from action, on the other, once I have come to a conclusion about a way forward I can be impatient to make it happen.

My Experiments

The most important learning I took away from the experimentation phase was that I can be very creative in designing ways to enable colleagues to engage with potentially sensitive issues. An example of this is the way I drew on the Time To Think (Kline, 2002) process to encourage ideas generation and my use of the VIA Strengths picture cards to stimulate a discussion.

I learnt that it can take time and effort for colleagues to feel comfortable with new ways of doing things. I need to acknowledge more intentionally that I, as a reflector, will have spent time thinking through the implications of a new idea and others will need that space too.

Overall, I think my planned experiments went well, although I think I could have been clearer about my intentions when introducing each one. Again, my tendency towards reflection can mean I do not always fully communicate the rationales for my suggestions or decisions clearly to others, meaning colleagues cannot see the thinking that led to a particular conclusion. If I am determined to create more open- ness in team discussions, I must reveal more of how I have arrived at a position and put this up for scrutiny by the team.

In planning my experiments I used the four learning styles to test my approach. As a strong reflector I can readily stand back and give detailed thought to a topic. However, this can lead to procrastination fuelled by a desire to have ‘all the data’ before making a move. For example, I intentionally viewed my plan through the activist lens to check that my plan would lead to action towards an outcome.

My Conclusions

I learnt a great deal about belonging in teams. Firstly, people need to feel comfort- able at work (i.e. they need to experience being treated fairly and with respect by everyone) (Deloitte, 2020). I realise that this is an ongoing dilemma to be managed, rather than a problem with a one-off solution.

Secondly, team members need to feel connected to each other, which includes being able to speak up and express ideas and emotions. I have learnt that individuals can have widely different attitudes to risk-taking in relation to speaking up in the workplace. There can be a considerable gulf between a simple statement that it’s OK to ‘speak truth to power’ and feeling that it is safe to do so. I believe I have strengthened my ability to work constructively with uncertainty in such sensitive arenas and, over time, to role model behaviours which demonstrate a genuine commitment to seeking and accepting constructive criticism.

Thirdly, people need to feel they are contributing to meaningful work outcomes. They need to see how their unique strengths help the team achieve outcomes for the organisation and clients. One of the major successes of this reflective cycle has been my capacity to design and implement team activities that focus firmly on our diverse, and collective, strengths.

With sufficient preparation I now know that I can manage difficult situations effectively. Having worked through several initial instances of powerful negative responses from some team members I need to be more confident about my capabilities and allay my anxieties about dealing with conflict and resistance. In addition, I have learnt that engaging the team in exploring how conflict can arise, rather than seeing myself as solely responsible for team harmony, creates greater collective understanding. This in turn leads to the team generating and as a result, taking greater ownership of the ideas for removing or minimising tensions.

One source of team members’ negativity related to the difficulties caused by other teams in our organisation when they do not perform satisfactorily. In those circum- stances my team finds itself compensating for gaps in the service in order that clients are not affected. This issue requires further exploration.

A further learning point is that the introduction and use of creative approaches (such as the VIA Strengths cards) can enable sensitive issues to be explored because they place those issues at one removed from the individuals involved. Focusing people’s attention on the cards meant that team members were not engaged in direct eye contact with each other all the way through a conversation about strengths with the result that they could be more open.

I have strong working and personal relationships with other team leaders at my level in the organisation. I chose to ‘buddy up’ with one of these colleagues to share the progress of my plan. She was extremely helpful in acting as a sounding board for my thinking, especially when I was facing challenges. I noticed that in addition to my reflector capabilities talking things through with a partner was invaluable in crystallising what to try next. This experience has boosted my confidence as a leader and I will continue this relationship and build others with similarly trusted colleagues across the organisation, which I now see could benefit other teams in my organisation. As an INFJ I can neglect to approach others when I need help. This experience has reminded me that when I reach out for support it is available and produces benefits.

Contrary to my initial perceptions of myself I can see now that I can be quietly influential of others in ways which acknowledge them as human beings and take on board their concerns and ideas. I feel more comfortable seeking feedback about my behaviours from colleagues as well as instigating occasional conversations with clients to gain their views about our service.

I feel much more aware of my capabilities as a leader and of the areas I need to focus my development. I propose to make the following improvements to my practice. I will:

* Develop my listening, facilitation and coaching skills so that I am better able to manage team meetings in collaborative ways
* Strengthen my skills in political astuteness so that I am better equipped to

manage the intricacies of team dynamics

* Be at ease with ‘good enough’ rather than perfection
* Create more time for one-to-one meetings with team members to establish an additional avenue for them to raise concerns and explore their thinking and ideas with me
* Devise a plan with my own manager which focuses on sustaining the

emerging, new team culture I have initiated

* Explore constructively with my fellow managers (and my line manager) the systemic issues impacting the connections between teams so that the pressures felt by team members are minimised
* Try to take myself a little less seriously.

I will test the effectiveness of these actions by instigating regular conversations about their impact with team members, team leader colleagues, my line manager and clients.

Overall I have learnt that I am a compassionate and creative human being who places the wellbeing of people at the heart of how I relate to others.

References

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**ASSIGNMENT 2: EFFECTIVE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CYCLE: FACILITATION OF WORKSHOPS**

Practitioner: [name redacted]

Date: 4 June 2023

Part 1: What Happened?

Intention

To enhance my facilitation practice during workshops by connecting with individual participants.

Motivation

* + To have a meaningful impact on workshop participants and for the learning opportunity to be as effective as possible.

My Values and Principles

* + I like to see people achieve more of their potential.
  + I believe that it is important to create positive learning environments.
  + One of my strengths is ‘love of learning.’

Professional Aspirations

* + To be seen as one of those educators that can have a positive and meaningful long-term impact on learners.
  + To support the learning of people in a way that is empowering and allows

them to feel valued.

Outcome

That workshop participants will feel valued by having an opportunity for one-to-one interaction with me as a facilitator.

Indicators of a Successful Outcome

* + Participants will evaluate the workshop positively.
  + Evaluations will include some references to the impact of my facilitation style.
  + Positive verbal feedback during the workshops.

Plan

**Table A1.2** Brief outline of plan

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What will happen?** | **When it will happen?** | **What resources are needed?** | **Who can provide support?** |
| I will review literature (e.g. Burke & Passmore, 2019) and podcasts on the use of strengths during workshops | April and May 2023 | Articles, books, podcasts | Co-facilitator of workshop; peers who are  also facilitators; experts in positive psychology and strengths use |
| Introduce new activity during workshop: Identify participants’ strengths and record these in order to share individually  at the end of the workshop | 1-3 June 2023 | Strengths cards, time for the activity. | Will need to discuss with co-facilitator  of the workshop and the course administrator who has agreed the outline of the workshop. |
| Seek feedback from participants and co- facilitator | 3 June 2023 | Time on the day. | Workshop participants and co-facilitator. |
| Read evaluation forms | June/July 2023 | Access to evaluation forms. | Course administrator. |

As part of the planning process, I undertook an ethical review and an Equality Impact Assessment. The ethical review highlighted the risk of providing some people with much more value than others, and the EIA alerted me to the potential of inadvertent discrimination because people from some cultural contexts might be less likely to take up an offer of additional 1-1 interaction.

Hypotheses

* Hypothesis 1: The majority of participants will want to hear about their strengths from me.
* Hypothesis 2: There will be positive verbal feedback from participants after I

have told them the strength that I have observed in them.

Experimentation

What Worked Well

* Participants were enthusiastic about receiving feedback from me.
* A few participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity.
* A few participants said that they felt valued and appreciated.
* The co-facilitator provided very positive feedback about the activity.
* I enjoyed the activity.

What Did Not Work

* + Those participants that had to leave early did not have an opportunity to receive feedback from me.
  + There was no agreed ‘queuing’ system for participants who wanted to receive

feedback from me at the end of the workshop.

Results

* + Most participants did stay on after the workshop to receive feedback from me. (Hypothesis 1 supported)
  + Many participants provided positive feedback about the exercise. (Hypothesis 2 supported)

Part 2: What did I Learn?

Appraisal

Overall, the reflective practice cycle was successful.

Desired Outcome for the Client

That workshop participants did feel valued by having an opportunity for one-to-one interaction with me as a facilitator. This was despite the fact that the activity did not go as smoothly as I had imagined. I will need to reflect further and have discussions with my co-facilitator to make some further tweaks to the activity. I felt very positive when participants were queuing up to talk to me. I was also very grateful to receive positive comments from the participants. One of them said ‘I really appreciated the way that you got to know each of us. It really made this a very meaningful learning experience for me’.

My Intention

My intention was to enhance my facilitation practice by connecting with individual participants. I felt that I achieved this intention and I think that it had the effect that I was hoping it would have.

My Learning and Reflections

Motivation and Intention

I was highly motivated to undertake this reflective practice cycle. I realised that my commitment to this work goes beyond simply ‘doing a good job’ or ‘being a competent professional’. It is important for me to feel that I have had a positive impact on the learning of workshop participants. This intention was very closely aligned to my values and the kind of educator that I would like to be – making it feel like quite a ‘high stakes’ experiment.

Even though I was very clear about my intention, I have realised that I was still unsure whether this strategy would work well with this particular group. My concern was that everyone would want to get away quickly at the end of a three-day workshop, especially as it ended on a Saturday afternoon. Even though I talked this through with colleagues, I need to try things out and experience success before I can adopt new facilitation practices.

One of my strengths is ‘love of learning’ (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and that has been helpful in a number of ways. First, I brought a genuinely curious mindset to this cycle and was very keen to learn about better ways of facilitating. Second, the outcome related to supporting the learning of others. I tend to learn best when I see things happening in practice, so I enjoyed the opportunity to try this out. Having experienced it, I’m now more convinced that this is a good idea, even though I already have further ideas about how to improve the activity for the next workshop.

Outcome

Although the outcome was achieved, I have realised that there is a risk of allocating too much time for this activity. My desire to make sure that participants feel valued can lead me to over-rating the importance of this intervention. My co-facilitator and I have spoken before about our perceptions that there is so much content that we are trying to squeeze into three days. I plan to keep the activity, but make it more efficient in future workshops.

Another thought that I captured in my reflective journal on the second day of the workshop was ‘my interactions with the participants should be conveying that I value them throughout the three days of the workshop. I should not have to rely entirely on one activity that takes place on the third day of the workshop to con- vey to participants that I value them. The activity is simply an additional indicator of this. Its purpose is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have a one- to-one interaction with me – but this does not mean that it is the *only* opportunity.’

The Plan

Reading up on the use of strengths and the impact it can have on people when their strengths are recognised and acknowledged (Niemic, 2018) was very helpful for me. So, the development of the plan was relatively straightforward. But what I learnt about myself is that I remain doubtful about new interventions until I have seen them happening in real situations. Talking to my co-facilitator about the idea was more reassuring since he was experienced with working with similar groups. His input was important to me in writing up the plan. Nonetheless, I was still not 100% confident until we tried it out. I want to do some more thinking about this. On the one hand, I think it’s good that I had the courage to try it out anyway, even though I was not sure whether it would work. On the other, there’s a risk that I get stuck in my ways because I won’t try things out until I’m sure they will work. When I think about this, I’m starting to understand that I need to try things out in real-life situations—but I will only try things out if there is already a good chance that it will work. This could mean that I do not go for really innovative or creative strategies. Maybe I’m a little bit too risk averse because getting it right is so important for me? I did not identify any particular ethical issues when reviewing my plan. However,

I made some adaptations after undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment. With reflection, I wondered whether everyone would be confident enough to come up to me to ask for feedback? Might some people feel intimidated to do so? Would some people prefer written feedback instead? Would some people have to leave earlier than the end because of other commitments? After considering these questions, I broadened the activity so that participants could ask for in-person feedback or ask for it to be sent via email.

The Experiment

The most important learning I took from the experimentation stage is the need to be quite explicit about how the activity will take place. The experiment made me realise that this activity needs to be very clearly defined because it seemed to straddle the clear ending of the formal workshop. In other words, it started before the formal ‘end time’ of 4:00pm but did not conclude until about 4:10pm. So, it can impact the experience of how the three-day workshop ends. Greater clarity from me about how much time the activity will take and a clearer explanation to everyone about the logistics of the last 30 minutes will be important in future.

What I have learnt about myself is that I can get too focused on one element of the workshop, so I need to see any new activities as complementing everything else that is already in place. Putting too much emphasis on one component of a three- day workshop could lead me to undermining my original intention which was to ensure that participants feel valued.

What I have learnt about my clients is that they appreciate the care and attention that I provide throughout the three-day workshop, and that the last activity is almost like the ‘icing on the cake’. I noticed that the participants left the workshop in very high spirits. Compared to the last time I co-facilitated this workshop, the last hour was very high-energy and positive.

I will need to take into account a few systemic factors as I continue to refine this new approach. First, adding any activity means that there is less time for something else. Before the next workshop, my co-facilitator and I will review the entire curriculum to ensure that we cover all the learning outcomes that have been advertised to participants. Second, finishing the workshop on a Saturday means that many participants are keen to finish early in order to return to loved ones. That is another reason that the ending of the workshop should be as tight and focused as possible. The best learning from the experiment is that the participants found the new activity very meaningful and that I enjoyed it too. I have to be careful that this activity is not just about me ending the workshop on a positive note. One thing that I had not taken into account is that both my co-facilitator and I were relatively tired by the end of facilitating a three-day workshop. This experiment has provided us with a high-impact close to the workshop that taps into the positive energy of the participants as well as the facilitators. We both left the session feeling positive and uplifted.

Conclusions

I’ve learnt that it is helpful to try new ideas and initiatives—and that I get a lot out of talking to colleagues about this. They give me greater confidence to try out new things. This cycle of reflective practice has highlighted to me how important being an inspiring facilitator is to me. Creating effective environments for learning is what I would like to do—and I will continue to ask questions about how I can do it better.

This cycle has boosted my confidence to try out new ideas and take some risks in the pursuit of inspiring outcomes for learners. I am excited about the idea of supporting learners to have meaningful and memorable experiences through the workshops that I deliver. And this way of doing it builds on my natural preference to focus on positives and strengths, so it feels like an authentic way forward.

Taking a broader view, I will look for situations where I can acknowledge and appreciate people individually. I am also keen to be similarly intentional about all my professional interactions as well as personal ones.

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