

Dealing with difficult people: how to keep calm and carry on!

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Overview

- Defining difficult people
- Influences
- Relationships at work
- Responding to unhelpful behaviours
- Improving your management of difficult situations
- Case example



How do we define difficult people?

- Different attitudes, values, beliefs, assumptions...
- Personality, self-awareness, emotional stability, confidence, self-esteem...
- Behaviours
 - Aggressive/Dominant
 - Passive aggressive
 - Disruptive
 - Critical
 - Resistant
 - Passive/Dependent



Influences

- Maybe it's about more than the individual...
 - Environment
 - Social stereotypes, bias, value systems
 - Culture and micro-cultures
 - Social pressures
 - History
 - Interconnected relationships



Relationships at work

- Effective working relationships
 - How can I create a motivated team?
 - Creating an enabling environment
 - Goal setting, feedback
 - Organisational justice
 - Empowerment
 - Is it meaningless?
 - What if you're a control freak or perfectionist?
 - Meaning, competence, self-determination, impact



Relationships at work

- Line managers have a significant impact on their direct reports' ...
 - Effectiveness
 - Career development
 - Job satisfaction
 - Psychological wellbeing
- ...and vice versa
 - Although when things go wrong the person with least power will be most affected



Relationships at work

- Vets and nurses tend to rely on technical skills as a source of legitimacy and power
 - People tend to get promoted on their individual contribution
 - Transition from getting things done yourself to getting things done via others
- The need for intra and interpersonal skills increases as you're promoted



Moving from difficult people to unhelpful behaviours




Responding to unhelpful behaviours

- Your behaviour
 - Taking things personally/responding emotionally
- Management by exception
 - Active/Passive
- Social recognition of effective behaviour
- Personal leadership development
 - Are you helping or hindering?
 - Reflective practice
 - Increasing self-awareness



Dealing with conflict

- Common, unavoidable
- Overcoming anxiety
- Emotional vs rational
- Empathy
- Be active
 - Give timely, specific feedback
 - Don't save up issues
 - Don't use the  sandwich!



Constructive feedback

- Two-way conversation and learning
- Reason for discussion
 - Observable behaviours (not impressions/opinions)
 - Don't give possible reasons
 - Open questions
- Response/ideas for solution
 - Active listening (and productive silences!)
- Agreed actions
 - Them and you
- Review date



Improving your management of difficult situations

Personal leadership development



Reflective practice

- Doing the right thing in a given situation
- Reflect on thoughts, plans, actions and outcomes
- Improve emotional skills, empathy, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication
- Capability to mentally step back from doing to think, reflect and learn



Getting started

- Personal reflection
 - Learning diary
- Friends, colleagues, peer groups, others
- Openness to feedback
- Be honest and avoid self-deception
 - Try not to simply blame yourself or others
- Challenge assumptions, judgements and bias
 - People, situations, etc.

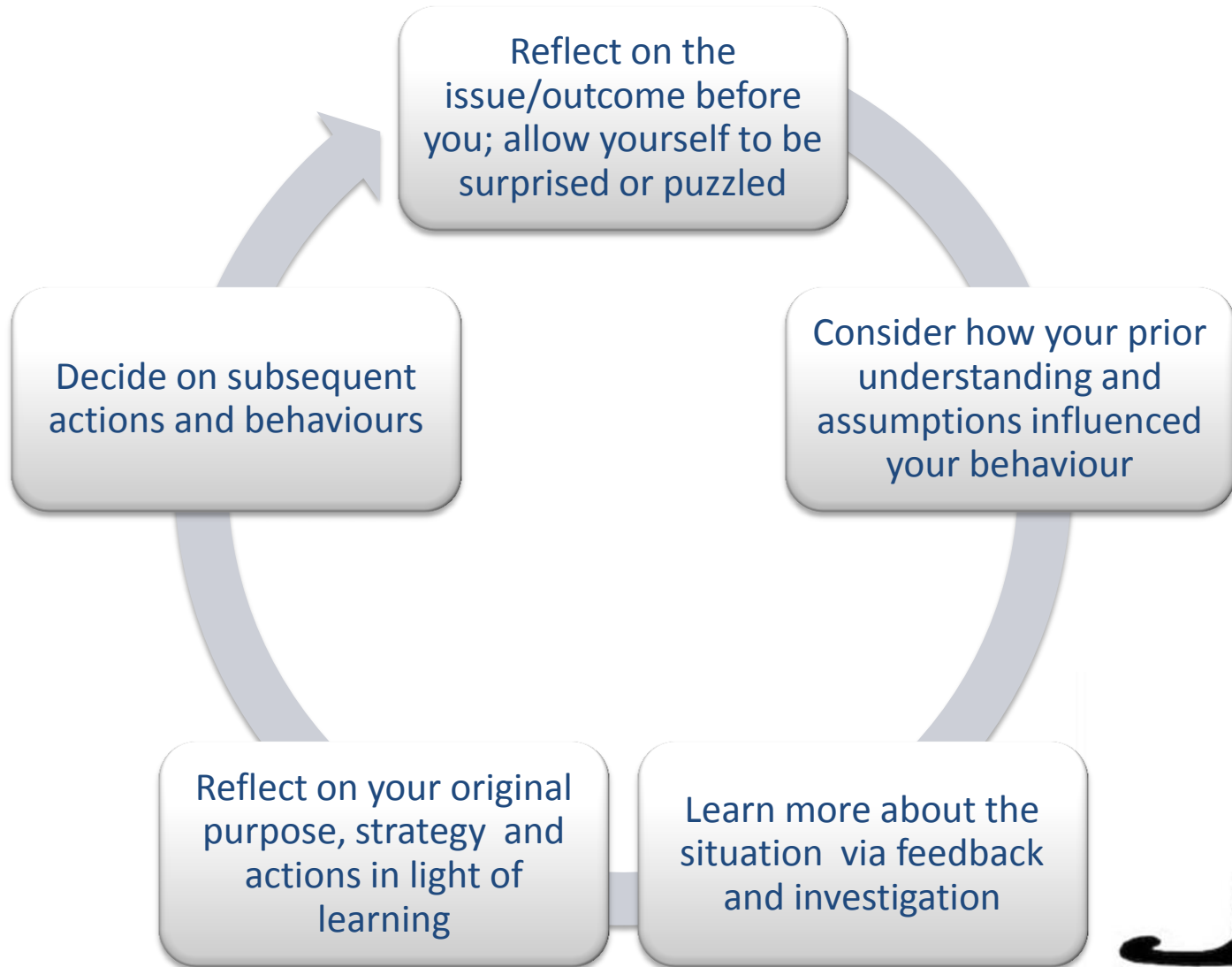


Learning diary

- What are the underlying circumstances?
- What's the purpose or goal?
- What's my strategy?
- What did I do?
- What was the outcome?
- How did I feel about it?
- What feedback did I receive?



Action learning



Case Example



- Donna has worked at Greendown Vets for 5 years, she has recently been promoted to HVN
- She has a team of 10 VNs and 2 SVNs
 - Teresa and Louise pre-date Donna
 - Teresa applied for the HVN role
- Donna is keen to improve pain management protocols, particularly for in-patients
- The partners are happy for the nursing team to pain score and make recommendations



Case Example



- The nursing team seem to welcome the change...
 - Improving patient welfare
 - Being more involved in decision making
- Teresa refuses to pain score, she says the VNs do a great job with the in-patients and can't see any reason to change
- What might be happening?



Case Example



- Donna is getting frustrated with Teresa's lack of compliance. One day in the prep room she gets angry and accuses Teresa of putting the fact she didn't get the HVN job above patient welfare
- Teresa retorts that Donna's new power has gone to her head. It's Donna that doesn't care about the patients. She's increasing paperwork unnecessarily that takes VNs away from proper nursing
- What are Donna's options?



Case Example



- Donna asks a friend who has been a HVN for many years for advice
- Her friend asks her to think about how she might have approached the situation differently and suggests Donna arranges to talk to Teresa in private and instigate an open conversation
- This is not what Donna wanted to hear
- What advice would we give Donna when approaching Teresa?



Case Example



- Donna apologises for accusing Teresa of not caring and that she'd like to have an open conversation in private that afternoon
- How might Donna approach the conversation?



Constructive feedback

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Case Example



- Donna manages to get Teresa to talk openly
- She finds out that:
 - Teresa was disappointed not to be HVN but that the Partners explained their reasoning
 - Teresa never learnt about pain scoring and is worried about:
 - Others finding out
 - Making a mistake
 - Making recommendations to the vets
 - It is taking the VNs a long time to fill out the sheets and there does seem to be some confusion



Case Example



- They decide Donna will give Teresa her CPD notes and instigate a more simple scoring system with training
- Teresa will read Donna's notes and begin pain scoring
- They will meet up again in a couple of weeks to assess progress
- Donna will update the team as agreed



Case Example



- Donna reflects on her learning
 - What are the underlying circumstances?
 - What's the purpose or goal?
 - What's my strategy?
 - What did I do?
 - What was the outcome?
 - How did I feel about it?
 - What feedback did I receive?



Summary

- Their might be more to 'difficult' people than meets the eye
- Think in terms of unhelpful behaviours and difficult situations
- Actively manage; be constructive
- Don't worry if things don't go to plan; people are complex and unpredictable!
- Learn via reflective practice



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