

Problem Solving

Problem Solving

The Productive Leader

Releasing time to lead™



Problem Solving



Problem Solving: introduction

'Have you got a problem?

Do what you can where you are with what you've got.'

Theodore Roosevelt

When people are faced with constant change, it is often difficult to decide where to begin.

In the NHS, as in many other organisations, costly mistakes are made by jumping to conclusions without considering all of the options. Identify the problem that needs to be addressed first, carefully explore all the options available and seek ways to gain acceptance and support. This can save valuable time and money.

Your objectives

To get the most from this module, it is helpful to focus on some key personal objectives.

List three things you would like to gain from this programme:

1

2

3

In what ways do you think this programme could help you enhance your team leadership skills?

In what ways do you think this programme could benefit your organisation as a whole?

How would you need to think, feel and act in order to achieve these objectives?

Think

Feel

Act

This module is divided into three topics

1. Identify the problem

2. Create new ideas

3. Gain acceptance and support

Identifying the problem



Problem solving processes

'How you think about a problem is more important than the problem itself – so always think positively.'







Norman Vincent Peale

There are many different ways to approach problem solving which set out to encourage people not to jump to conclusions too soon. Edward de Bono encouraged people to think laterally, to come up with different solutions. This is often termed 'thinking out of the box', or 'blue sky thinking'.

Psychologists who use cognitive behavioural therapy also favour a problem solving approach. By exploring all the issues surrounding the problem, possible solutions often appear.

If you just keep doing what you've always done, you will continue to get what you've always got.

Six thinking hats

 <p>White Objective Facts and Figures</p>	 <p>Yellow Optimistic Positive</p>
 <p>Red Emotions</p>	 <p>Green Creativity New ideas</p>
 <p>Black Careful Cautious Sees weaknesses</p>	 <p>Blue Control of process</p>

Edward de Bono's Six thinking hats process helps you see things from different points of view. Just as the Herrmann profile, which we use in other modules, explains how different people prefer to think, learn and solve problems, Edward de Bono's theory explains how different people prefer to communicate. He categorises people into six groups, defined by six coloured hats. He demonstrates that at any one meeting, you will have people approaching a problem from different perspectives. Rather than causing conflict, he suggests you encourage individuals to use diverse approaches to create novel solutions, saving time and confusion.

You can find out more about Edward de Bono's Six thinking hats in *Thinking Differently*, NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, www.institute.nhs.uk.

How this works in meetings

To avoid the style of meeting where people do not listen properly and just wait until they can have their say, try using the six hats approach.

Select a coloured hat and explain to everyone the perspective symbolised by the hat. For example, you could start by selecting the white hat and ask everyone to share facts and figures.

Then the discussion evolves with everyone speaking from the same perspective. When you have exhausted this perspective, move on to a different one, for example, the green creative ideas hat. For each issue, explore all perspectives. You can revisit a perspective if new thoughts develop. By the end of the discussion the issue will have been discussed from everyone's perspective.



Identifying the problem: exercise



Exercise: cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) problem solving technique

Part one: exploring the problem

Take any issue or problem that you currently have to deal with. Ask yourself the following questions. Write what you know in as much detail as possible; use extra paper if you need it.

1. What do you know about this situation?
2. Is there anything you do not know about this situation (but would like to know)?
3. Why is this a problem for you?
4. What have you already thought of or tried?
5. If this problem were resolved, what would you have that you do not have now?
6. What might you be assuming that you do not have to assume?

Exercise: CBT problem solving technique

Part two: action

Look back at what you have written about the problem or issue after answering the previous questions.

1. Did any of the information that emerged surprise you?
2. What actions do you need to take to find out further information?
3. How can you proceed from here?



Reflection and actions



Use this page to record your observations.

How might you use some of these problem identifying techniques in your everyday life?

Empty text box for reflection on everyday life.

Can you identify a meeting where it might be useful to use the coloured hats approach?

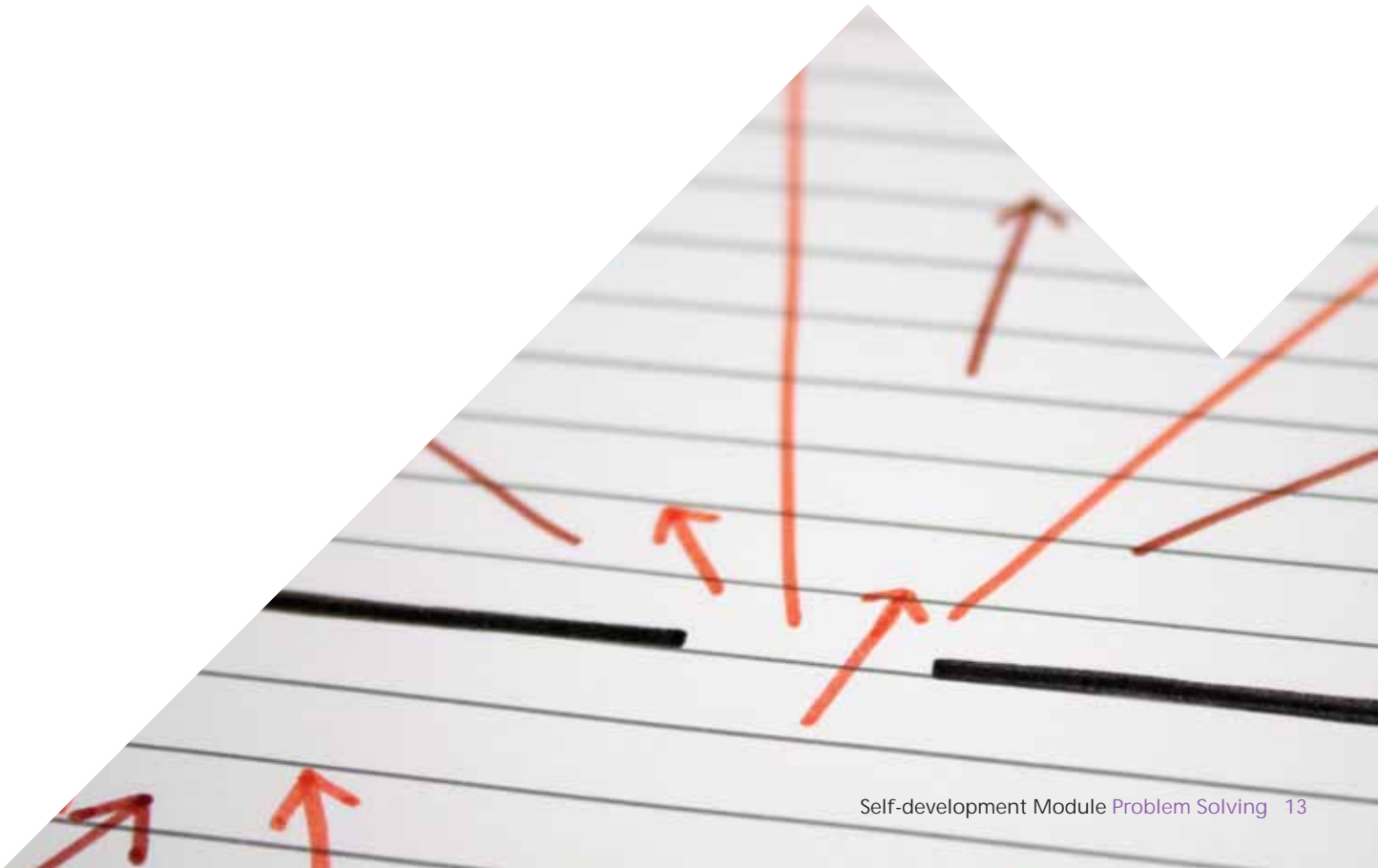
Empty text box for reflection on meeting.

How might the CBT problem solving approach help you better understand a problem?

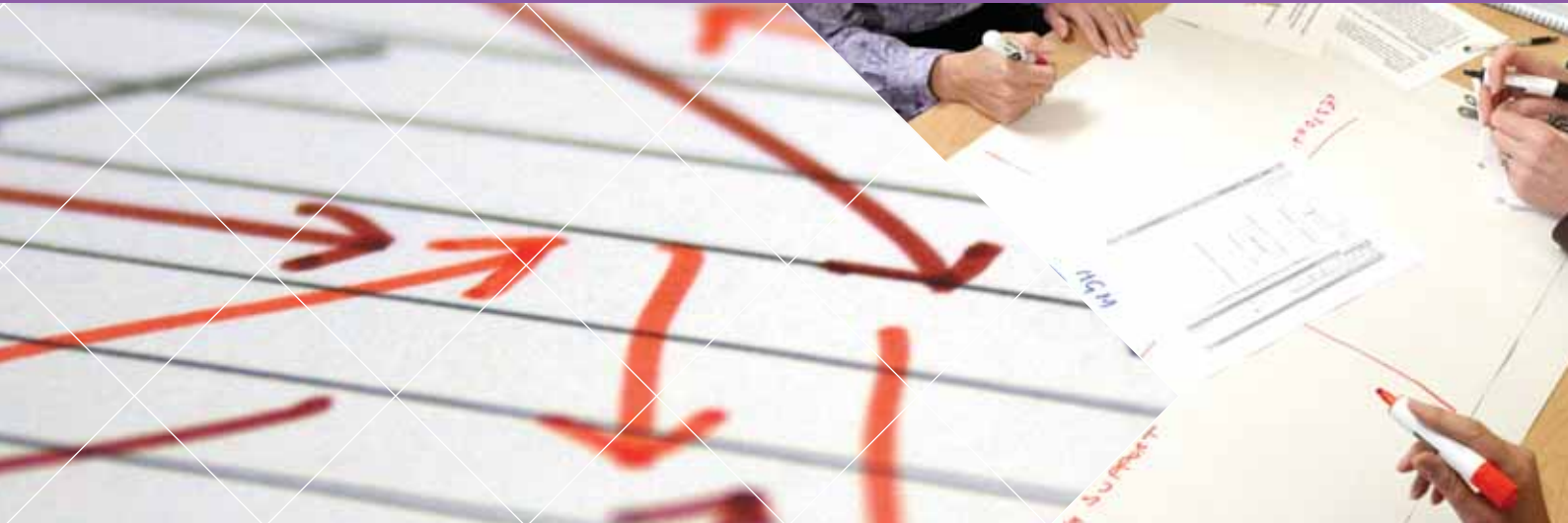
Empty text box for reflection on CBT approach.

Tips

- Use techniques to try to see things differently.
- Try not to jump to conclusions or solutions too quickly.
- Take time to make sure that you understand all the different elements of the problem or issue.
- Try to step back to see all the consequences of your decisions.
- Remember that the only constant thing in life is change, so try to go with it rather than fight against it.



Generating new ideas



Being creative to generate new ideas

'To think creatively, we must be able to look afresh at what we normally take for granted.'

George Kneller, Philosophy of Education Chair, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, UCLA

With all the changes in the NHS, it is imperative that new ways are found to deal with the constant pressures and demands.

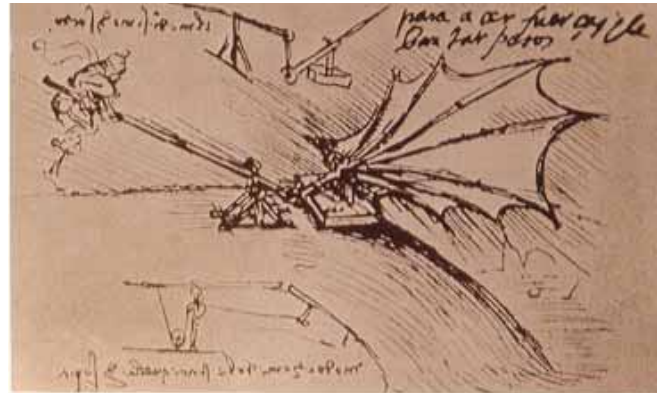
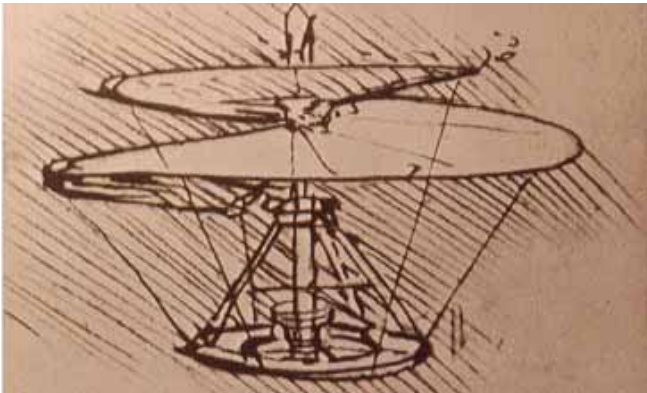
'We know where most of the creativity, the innovation, the stuff that drives productivity lies: in the minds of those closest to the work.'

Jack Welch, former chief executive, General Electric

It is NHS staff who are actually dealing with the situation, who have the experience and the drive to generate new solutions and ideas.



The whole brain approach



Leonardo da Vinci, *Helicopter and lifting wings*

Using the scientific and the artistic approach can lead to novel solutions.
We need to use the whole brain to be creative.

Some common myths about generating new ideas

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

In today's world, with constantly changing technology and new drugs being invented, it is imperative that new ways of accommodating them are adopted.

Only creative people can come up with new ideas.

It is only the people who are actually doing the work that know what would make a good idea.

Good ideas are obvious from the outset.

All new ideas are like fragile seeds that have to be nurtured to grow into useful suggestions.

If we've tried it before there is no point considering it again.

As there have probably been many changes since you last tried things this way, it is worth considering it again.

If it sounds stupid there is no point considering it.

On the contrary, stupid ideas often lead to creative possibilities when they are discussed and built on.

Generating new ideas: exercises



Exercise 1: collecting ideas quickly

If you are in a meeting and there is little time to collect everyone's ideas try this technique:

- give everyone two sticky notes
- ask people to write positive suggestions on one note and any concerns or negative thoughts on the other
- stick all the positive suggestions on one piece of flip chart paper and all the concerns on the other.

You can then discuss everyone's opinions quickly.

This is a good way of collecting ideas if you want to do it confidentially, without anyone feeling inhibited. This is also a good way to involve people who are introverted and seldom speak up in meetings.



Exercise 2: how creative are you?

On a scale of 0 - 10 mark your own abilities in these areas:

	Score		Score
Simplifying? Are you able to see the big picture... ...and to eliminate clutter from complexity?	<input type="text"/>	Intuitive? How good are your powers of intuition?	<input type="text"/>
Vision/goals? Do you have a clear-cut set of goals... ...and a definite vision to guide you?	<input type="text"/>	Risk-taking? How willing are you to pursue your ideas to completion... ..even when the odds are stacked against you	<input type="text"/>
Self-belief? How strong is your self-belief... ...when it comes to being creative?	<input type="text"/>	Curiosity? How curious are you about things... ...information, people and life in general?	<input type="text"/>
Openness? Are you receptive to ideas... ...and alert to creative opportunities?	<input type="text"/>	Flexibility? Are you able to manipulate ideas... ...are you able to see things beyond the routine?	<input type="text"/>
Proactivity? Are you able to initiate action... ...or do you tend to wait for directives?	<input type="text"/>	Resourceful? When you are in a jam, do you seek out... ..or create opportunities for solutions?	<input type="text"/>
Trendspotting? How well do you actively monitor change in your field... ..as well as in life?	<input type="text"/>	Challenging? Do you blindly accept the status quo... ...or are you able to challenge assumptions?	<input type="text"/>

Problem Solving

Which areas did you score low on?

How you could take action to improve them?

Your notes

Exercise 3: developing ideas

When having a discussion about doing things differently, it might be useful to try the Scamper technique:

- consider a challenge, such as 'how do we reduce hospital acquired infection?'
- break the challenge down into all of its component parts and then use the Scamper technique
- go through each of the elements and see what you can change
- this can be undertaken in a group setting or completed alone on paper.

SCAMPER

Substitute – do people have to be in hospital? Do we change procedures?

Combine – could we combine a hygiene procedure with another procedure?

Adapt or adopt – how could we learn from what is done elsewhere?

Modify/magnify/minimise – if this problem became worse what would you do?

Put to other uses – what might be the benefits of more or less patient contact?

Eliminate/Rearrange – how could you see the problem from a different perspective?

Exercise 4: group mind map for problem solving

If there is an occasion where you want a team to consider an issue, applying a mind map can gather all the thoughts and opinions of a team in a structured and logical way.

Follow these instructions to achieve a clear picture of everyone's views:

- ask everyone to write the issue in the centre of a piece of plain A4 paper and to draw a quick mind map containing any thoughts, concerns or feelings they have about the issue
- give the group a piece of flip chart paper and ask them to combine everything on all of their mind maps into one large mind map.

This exercise allows everyone a few minutes to gather their own thoughts around the issue. It is a very inclusive technique as everyone's views are included. It can engender a sophisticated discussion about exactly what people mean and the relationship of their thoughts to others.

You can find out more about mind mapping in the Information Processing module.

Exercise 5: using metaphors for creative solutions

This might sound like a very strange creative technique, but it has proved invaluable to many organisations to approach a problem or issue in a new way. It can be used with a group or on your own.

- Select your challenge, for example *'how can we design a new clinical skills laboratory?'*
- Ask *'how is driving a bus like designing a new clinical skills laboratory?'*
- On the left, list all the skills needed to drive a bus successfully.
You need to list about 20 skills, so think of as much detail as possible.
- On the right, list any skills that are comparable or related to setting up a new laboratory.

For example:

Driving a bus	Designing a new clinical skills laboratory
Know the route	Know what is needed in a laboratory
Have a driving licence	Locate qualified people

More examples for using metaphors for creative solutions

How is improving communication within the team like sailing the Atlantic?

How is reaching targets like gardening?

How is managing change like mixing a cocktail?

You can find out more about using metaphors in Thinking Differently, NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, www.institute.nhs.uk.



Reflection and actions



Use this page to record your observations.

How might coming up with new ideas help you achieve your goals?

How do your reactions to other people's suggestions affect the number of suggestions you are given? For example, are you open or judgmental of different opinions and new ideas?

How can you apply this information to enhance working performance and relationships in your own environment?



Gaining acceptance and support



Gaining acceptance and support: the C-step engagement process

1. Clear communication
2. Critical champions
3. Continual commitment

However good the new idea or suggestion is, it will be very difficult to put it into practice if there is no support for it. In this ever-changing world, medical initiatives and new directives require real support.

Lip service often leads to failure and demoralisation.

Gaining practical and emotional commitment is the only way to ensure success.

'An idea not coupled with action will never get any bigger than the brain cell it occupied.'

Arnold Glasgow

1. Clear communication

It is important to let people know what you are planning to do to gain their acceptance and support.

In the Communicating and Influencing module you will find many techniques and strategies to help you tell people what you are planning to do. Often, giving staff details of what the new directives will actually mean to them, allays fears and encourages them to give you support.

Remember that people will always find out what is happening, particularly in the public arena of the health service. It is always advisable to give the correct facts, at the right time, rather than letting people find out from gossip or the media.



2. Critical champions

All new initiatives and changes need people to champion them. This is especially true of changes that require new ways of working, which will cause disruption and the breaking of old, familiar habits. To gain support it is first important to make sure that people feel valued and respected. For example starting a meeting late can show scant respect for participants' time.

Things to consider

Discussions, and the opportunity for participants to contribute to the solution, help to increase involvement and commitment.

Encouraging individual contribution can help people feel that their opinions are valid and being heard.

'You must be the change you wish to see in the world.'

Mahatma Gandhi

3. Continual commitment

When change is about to happen, it is important to keep everyone informed at all stages. This keeps the momentum going. It is not enough to pay lip service to change at the beginning of a project. New ideas and innovation need continual nurturing and support.

Plan to update information on a continuous basis in as many ways as possible to meet individual learning styles, eg posters, newsletters, podcasts, notices in meetings. If you do not tell people what is going on, they will find out from inaccurate and damaging gossip. Listen for comments like:

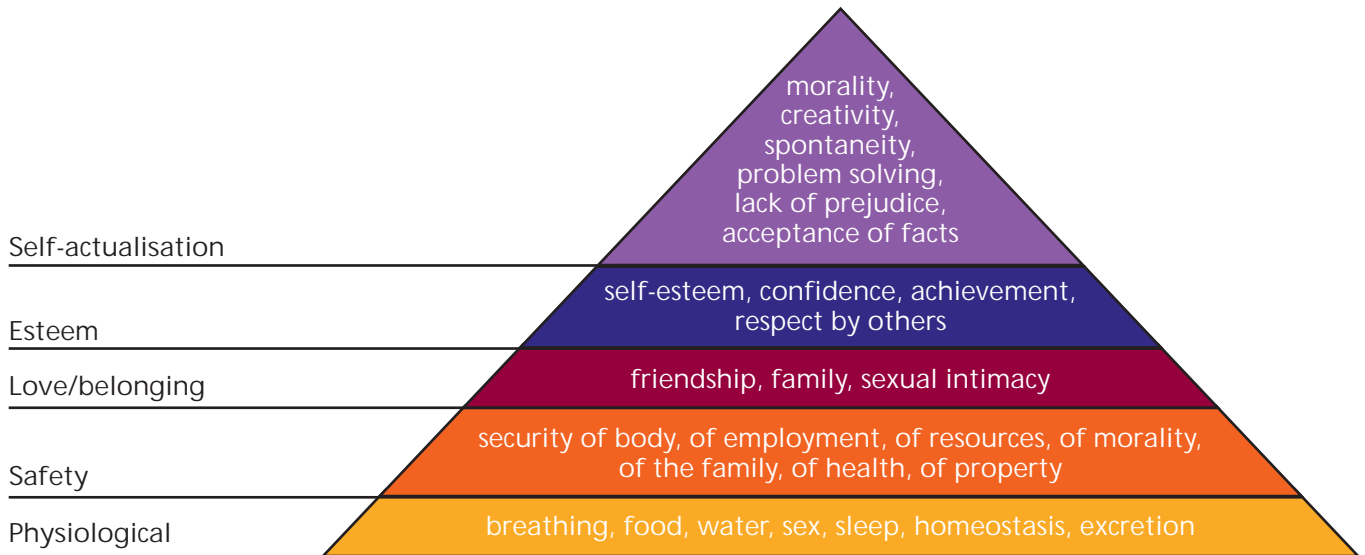
- *'it will not work'*
- *'they never listen to us'*.

Be ready with answers and the evidence of how you plan to ensure that things will really work. Have contingency plans that will be acceptable to all.

'Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organisational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.'

Andrew Carnegie

Maslow's hierarchy of needs – addressing all levels of needs gains you acceptance and support



In his book *Motivation and Personality*, (1954), Abraham Maslow describes how important it is to take care of the basic human needs. This can be as simple as providing enough chairs for a meeting. If someone feels uncomfortable it is difficult to listen and to fully engage. Both listening and engaging are prerequisites for gaining support for new ideas.

Gaining acceptance and support: exercises



Exercise 1: adopt a different perspective

Take a potential solution to an existing problem and think of another person who will be involved. See the solution from the other person's point of view. Answer the following questions, as if you were them.

How will this make me feel?

What will I get from this situation?

How will it make my life easier?

How will I benefit from this?

What does this situation require me to do?

Why would I want to support this solution?

What will be in it for me?

When you have completed this, look at the facts contained in your assumptions. With these in mind, consider how you can communicate with that person to address their needs and concerns and gain their support.

For example, if someone was concerned the solution you have devised will involve a great deal more work in the short term, you could present the solution to them in such a way as to emphasise that it will save them a great deal of time in the long term.

A coaching approach to gaining acceptance and support

If key individuals do not support new initiatives, success will be difficult. In order to gain people's full support it is sometimes necessary to understand their concerns first. Adopting a coaching style of communication enables you to encourage the person to consider their feelings and possible objections. Care must be taken not to be directive or authoritarian in these situations, as the aim is to encourage the person to be honest and forthcoming.

It is possible to use this approach in both individual discussions and with a small team during a meeting.

Use the HELP model of coaching, opposite, to discuss any concerns a person might have with new ways of working.



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Exercise 2: the HELP model of coaching

This model can be applied to individual concerns about change.

Hear	Empathise
<p>Hear what concerns the person has Invite the person to think carefully Set goals</p>	<p>Make sure you understand what the person is telling you Realise that feelings are as important as facts Avoid or check assumptions Ignore irrelevant input during the discussion</p>
List possible actions	Plan
<p>Invite the person to consider as many actions as possible Offer any suggestions carefully and tactfully</p>	<p>Whatever is decided, make sure you agree on a future action Between you, identify possible options Make the plans as detailed as possible Decide what support the person might need</p>

Reflection and actions



Use this page to record your observations.

Consider situations where you were not able to gain support and think of what you could have done differently.

Identify individuals who might have concerns about change and consider how you can best deal with them.

How can you plan to introduce changes in a positive and energising way?

Tips for gaining acceptance and support

- Notice body language that might give away people's real feelings.
- Share your vision and engage others with clear goals.
- Recognise that initial feelings of being uncomfortable with new situations are valid and real for people.
- Keep your own language and body language positive to enthuse others.
- Be prepared with facts and figures supporting new approaches.
- Acknowledge that other people may not have the same response to a situation as you do.
- Listen carefully so that you are able to discuss real concerns and dispel fears.

Decision time: make three decisions now

Decide three changes to help you communicate more effectively in your team.
Commit to doing these three things next week.

My decisions are:

1

2

3

See your success

Visualisation has been proven to support the successful achievement of goals. It is a technique used by many athletes, actors and professionals.

Close your eyes for a moment and visualise your success; see yourself achieving your goals, step-by-step:

- what barriers will you manage to get past?
- what will you be doing?
- what will you look like?
- how will you feel?
- how will other people know?

Make the images clear, positive and colourful. Imagine yourself in the picture and notice what it feels like to achieve your goals.



Further Information

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Problem Solving

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