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My story

Following a career in education, I have worked in the People Profession for the last five years. My career has mainly been in Organisational Development within the NHS. My role is a varied one which is centred around employee experience and employee voice.

Outside of my paid role, I am a director and trustee of a local third-sector organisation, PATCH, which operates as a food-bank and a charity shop across Pembrokeshire. In this role, I am the sole HR practitioner on the board.

I live and work in Pembrokeshire, with my fiancé. I'm truly grateful to live in such a beautiful part of the world and I love nothing more than hiking or running the incredible Pembrokeshire coastline.

When reflecting on my own practice, I have chosen to use Gibbs's reflective model (Gibbs, 1988). This is a popular and well-established framework which allows for structured reflection and one I've used throughout my career.

Gibbs' framework is advantageous in many ways. Its sequential structure is accessible and provides a clear path for reflection (University of Edinburgh, 2020). It covers the breadth of an experience and allows for wide reflection (Li et al, 2020). I have used Gibbs' model in different contexts throughout my professional and personal life, owing to its versatility (Belvis et al, 2013). It does, however, have some limitations. Some writers argue that Gibbs' linear model can limit deep reflection or can mean that the 'in the moment' reflections are missed (Moon, 2004)

Overall, I've chosen Gibbs' model over other models as it's one I feel most comfortable with and one that I'm familiar with. Through the following reflections, I've applied Gibbs' framework to the CIPD's core behaviours at Chartered Member level. For People Professionals, the core behaviours are the demonstrable attributes required to be successful (CIPD, 2022a)



POLICIES & PERSONALITIES

Ethical Practice
Situational Decision-making

Description

The charity was originally founded by one person. As the charity grew, this employee assumed a salaried role as General Manager. There was no selection process or other candidates considered. Since then, the charity has grown into a busy and essential third-sector organisation.

In the two years preceding me joining the board, this employee had been on sick leave for 18 months. This meant that the organisation was being run by volunteers, with operational management being undertaken by the Trustees. The employee had been absent for a number of reasons; notably because she was awaiting a knee replacement.

She was in receipt of occupational sick pay which should have been exhausted six months previously. However, the trustees did not rescind pay and the employee continued receiving full pay. I questioned the effectiveness of this and asked how this absence had been managed. It transpired that this employee had not been managed at all and, in my opinion, it was miraculous that the charity was still able to open its doors without an effective manager. Amongst many factors, this was not in line with the expected 'Duty of Prudence' required of Trustees (Charity Commission, 2020).

This wasn't about following a policy to dismiss someone; this was about being compassionate and making sure that we were doing the very best we could to support this employee. This is in keeping with guidance both from the CIPD (2023) and ACAS (2023).

Over a long period, with considerable discussion, legal advice and following the employee's request, the employee received a severance agreement from the organisation.

Feelings

I had mixed feelings about this. My overwhelming feeling was apprehension. As the only HR professional in the organisation, I did feel a sense of apprehension and a great sense of responsibility to do the right thing. On reflection, this is widely felt by professionals in standalone HR roles (Beaven, 2020). I felt sadness, both for the organisation and for the employee. I also felt slightly frustrated that this situation had not been managed properly. I was frustrated that this had escalated to a point that that seemed almost cold and uncaring. I was feeling some moral distress, which can loosely be defined as 'not being able to do the right thing' (Morley et al, 2019). I was aware of the impact this would have on the employee, volunteers and on the reputational of the organisation.

When the process was over I thought I would feel a sense of relief, but I actually felt completely exhausted. As a professional I certainly had signs of burnout, which is quite common amongst People Professionals (Pirrolas & Correia, 2024).



Evaluation

I am really proud of the way that I made people-centred decisions, guided by my values. I am proud of how I used my professional networks (namely, the CIPD Employment Law Helpline) in a purposeful way. Utilising networks such as these compliment the desired role of People Professionals as strategic partners of business (Dhanpat et al, 2020). I was able to influence and role-model positive behaviours by showing professionalism and fairness. I was conscious of the importance placed on HR of balancing wellbeing with performance (Salas-Vallina et al, 2020)

When I think about the negatives of this experience, I am reminded of the emotional toll that it took on all parties involved. To end somebody's employment in such a way is not a positive process regardless of the circumstances. This was a very distressing process, coupled with trying to manage the anxieties of other stakeholders.

Overall, I believe that my intentions and my contributions were positive. 12 months later we have achieved a stable culture with visible leadership. There is now a growing level of trust and psychological safety which was notably absent previously. As a Board, we recognise our own shortcomings and are making steps to diversify. This is in line with the recommended practice for board effectiveness (Charity Governance Code, 2020).

it was a very difficult incident, but I do feel that the situation was resolved. I was concerned about the reputational damage this would have on the organisation but overall our donations have increased and our presence in the county has increased.

Analysis

Overall, this went as well as it could have. I am very proud of the ethical and fair decision making that took place during this process. The situation was regularly emotionally-charged, and I am proud that I utilised logic and expertise with the right amount of compassion and empathy for all of the involved parties.

Conclusion

In general, I learned that being a People Professional is often gruelling, emotionally draining and extremely challenging. My biggest reflection from this scenario is the responsibility placed on HR colleagues and how they are key to ensuring organisations are operating ethically.

I also learned that in situations like this, there is a fine balance between emotion and pragmatism. At many points, I should have 'checked-in' with myself to safeguard my own wellbeing.

Action Plan

If I were to do the same thing again, I would ensure that any organisation I worked with had a robust policy infrastructure to support staff absence (Fisher et al, 2023). This would also include the implementation of a performance management process that supported staff wellbeing (Rasool et al, 2021).

On a personal level, I would like to develop some stress-management techniques for high pressure situations. I will explore options for this over the coming months. Ideally, I would value some mentorship from experienced HR professionals.

BRAVERY & BALANCE SHEETS

*Professional Courage & Influence
Commercial Drive*

Description

This reflection is based around a culmination of events. The charity originally operated solely as a food bank, providing emergency parcels to clients in poverty. The charity did not have a solid income stream and relied solely on sporadic donations. In order to sustain the business model and face the rising operating costs, the organisation needed some form of income generation. This is not dissimilar to the scenario that many foodbanks are facing across the United Kingdom (Williams & May, 2022; Etherington et al, 2022).

The manager had envisaged a charity shop that would generate income and build better relationships with clients. When I joined the board, my colleagues were not in agreement with the manager and felt that this would be too much work to manage. I disagreed and, after some research, could see the value this would bring to the charity. After months of listening, learning and influencing, a charity shop was opened. In the 18 months since, the charities income has increased by 60%.

Feelings

As a new Trustee, I felt nervous about disagreeing with my colleagues. I did not want to be perceived as belligerent, but I equally felt that my points were valid. I took the time to listen to everyone. I was conscious to listen to understand (Simmons, 2011) in order to build relationships and ensure I had the full picture.

I think other people felt apprehensive and exasperated with the project idea. I could sense a feeling of nonchalance and disengagement whenever the idea was mentioned. When I eventually made the proposal to open a shop, I felt nervous. I was worried that my colleagues would feel I was overreaching their perceived HR remit, so I had to ensure that I tackled the issue with a commercial mindset. In hindsight, this approach was the right one as it also led to a greater appreciation for the People Profession and its role in business strategy. This is an approach championed by the profession at large (Bailey, 2023).

I feel a sense of pride that I presented an evidence-based, commercial proposal. I am glad I was able to influence my colleagues and face opposition in a measured, pragmatic way.

Evaluation

At the time, I was very new to the organisation and it was my first board-level position. I made a conscious effort to build relationships with my colleagues. Similarly, by actively listening to the Manager's hopes for a shop, I cemented a positive relationship with her.

However, some things could have gone better. My biggest reflection is that I should have gained a greater understanding of the financial processes involved in such an operation. I underestimated the complexity required from the Treasurer and my Trustee colleagues. This reflection applies to most areas of HR. In order to be a successful People Professional, it is important to have a sound understanding of finance and strong business acumen (CIPD, 2022b).

Analysis

I believe that things went well because I took the time to listen and to reflect on what I had heard. Having often been given feedback that I can rush into things, I was careful not to give emotional responses. I was also aware that this was a situation where conflict could have arisen. I was mindful of Kilmann's conflict styles and endeavoured to consistently navigate towards the 'collaborating' zone (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976).

There were times when I did not have a full understanding of the financial implications of opening a shop. I should have taken more time to listen and learn from colleagues that were more skilled and experienced than I. This was a big change for the organisation. Reflecting on Kotter's change model, I can see now that I did not put enough focus on cultivating a 'guiding coalition' (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). This is something I will work on

Conclusion

I learned that in order to influence effectively, one must be confident to challenge others' views (Greenacre et al, 2014). In order for this to be successful, many things need to be present beforehand. For me, it was professional credibility and integrity. Without building deep relationships first, it was difficult for others to make a judgement on my values.

Action Plan

In the short term, I need to prioritise refining my influencing skills. I shall explore the many courses and webinars available. I need to expand my financial knowledge and understanding, particularly around charity governance and the role that People Professionals play in that arena.



MOVERS & SHAKERS

*Valuing People
Passion for Learning*

Description

When I joined the OD Team, I was tasked with increasing the Exit Interview response rate. It had plateaued at 13% and was inconsistently promoted and facilitated across the organisation. The organisation had made significant investment in culture change and leadership development. This investment naturally came with high expectations of my team.

Whilst staff retention had become top of the agenda across the whole NHS (NHS Confederation, 2018). I knew that the Exit Interview process was a key component in retention (Hossain et al, 2017). I also knew that it required a fundamental shift in order to be successful. I wanted to empower leavers to give feedback whilst also ensuring that this feedback was used constructively. I was curious about the barriers to the process and wanted to ensure that this project enhanced employee voice.

After discussions with my manager, coupled with research, I mapped out the new process. This consisted of three main aspects. Firstly, it required a shift from an 'interview' to a 'questionnaire'. This meant that leavers were no longer required to have an 'interview' with their manager (Mokibelo, 2020; Konig et al, 2022) which had previously been the only option. Thirdly, due to high numbers of internal movement, this process was now open to staff who were moving department, rather than exclusively for those leaving our employment entirely.

Through webinars, information sessions and word of mouth we were able to influence stakeholders that the exit questionnaire is a truly meaningful exercise.

We were able to develop dashboards that displayed exit questionnaire data. This is available to all senior managers so they can access real-time data on why people are leaving and, crucially, why people are staying in the department.

Feelings

I remember feeling like I had a mountain to climb when I first realised the challenge ahead. One of the biggest challenges was creating a sense of shared-purpose, trying to convince key stakeholders that this would have a positive impact on wellbeing and general culture.

I think other people would have had different feelings than me. For managers, I picked up on a sense of apprehension and disengagement. On exploration, I ascertained that this was because there had historically been no action taken from exit interviews.

Following this change, I think that people feel much more empowered across the organisation. This was a case of winning 'hearts and minds' rather than educating about a process.

Looking back, I feel pride and contentment that I have increased staff voice. I am delighted that many other health boards use this model as best practice.



CONFLICT IN CEREDIGION

*Working Inclusively
Insights Focussed*

Description

A large part of my role is conflict management. This can range from working with individuals to working with whole teams. Two teams work side by side in the community. One is a District Nurse (DN) Team and the other is the Acute Response Team (ART). Both have similar service models and provide care in patients' homes, either to prevent a hospital admission or following a discharge from hospital.

Whilst similar in service provision, the teams have many differences. For example the DN team only work Monday to Friday office hours where is the ART team operate 24-hour service. This particular issue manifested as some low-level enmity from the ART Team. There is often crossover between the two teams and communication is key to ensure that patient's needs are met (Yost et al, 2000). There have been harrowing reports of 'us and them' cultures in the NHS (Harkensee et al, 2022) and I was very mindful of this throughout the process.

This had escalated and sickness absence had risen. Some colleagues were refusing to work with each other which, in turn, led to the re-rearing of unsaid historical issues.

Using a series of informal interviews and data gathering (Young, 2023), I saw that the team had become dysfunctional and made a conscious decision to set up informal mediation across both teams. An important to note here is that I did not fully explore the data before discovering this situation. Overall, this was challenging and emotive, but it did lead to a full reconciliation and harmonious working relationships.

Feelings

Before the situation I certainly felt a sense of apprehension and trepidation. I am fairly confident in my ability to manage conflict but conflict within teams is always unpredictable. I explored Lencioni's (2010) team dysfunction model and was mindful that what I was witnessing was a real lack of accountability from both teams. I think that's where the apprehension came from.

I was also slightly nervous because I did not know many of the staff very well. I think the other people involved would have been equally as nervous and also quite distressed because this conflict had caused some serious issues within the team. Some of the staff told me that they were worried this process would "go formal", meaning they would face disciplinary action, so there was certainly a sense of fear in the room and I wonder if this led to a decreased sense of psychological safety. Research suggests that teams with high levels of psychological safety massively impacts the interactions between the team members (Johnson & Avolio, 2019)

During this situation, I felt calmer than I had before. I was reassured by my experience and expertise in conflict resolution. I remembered the training that I had undertaken which looked at exploring the unmet needs of the parties involved. This certainly gave me a grounding and help set the tone in the room. Looking back at the situation I hope that people felt that it was a positive, if not controlled and calm, situation and experience for everyone involved.

Evaluation

There were many that were good things about the experience. Overall it had a successful outcome for all involved which was ultimately the main goal. Personally, I felt that I collaborated effectively, listened and made sure that my approach was inclusive to ensure that we achieved the shared goal.

I am really proud of the way that I was able to listen and listen actively. It was really important for me that I was able to ask appropriate and relevant questions at the right time. It was equally as important that I was able to take the information from those questions and look at them as evidence, so I was able to evaluate effectively. This is particularly difficult when, very often during conflict, you are not dealing with fact as much as you're dealing with emotions. However, it really helped to be able to understand the whole picture

Naturally, there were things that did not go so well. Overall, I would have liked to have a little bit more engagement from the senior managers of this department. I believe that if they had been a little more active at the beginning, the conflict may never have escalated to this level. This is in line with Erzen & Armagen's (2015) research which demonstrates the importance of leadership in conflict resolution.

Analysis

In general, things went well because of a number of factors. Firstly, the use of active listening was key here. Research shows that listening actively deepens understanding (Weger et al, 2014). I was glad I took the time to have informal interviews with staff in order to build a broad picture. This allowed me, as the mediator, to focus on the unmet needs rather than the conflict. On reflection, I think the robust conflict resolution training I have had was definitely a catalyst for success.

As mentioned, I think early intervention from the service leads may have gone some way in preventing this all-out conflict. Some research suggests that intervention at an early stage avoids dysfunctional conflict (Hoel et al, 2006). This needs further exploration as it may suggest a lack of conflict resolution skills within the department.

Conclusion

During this process, I learned many things. One of my biggest reflections is the importance of addressing unmet needs to resolve conflict. In this case, each person involved had distinct unmet needs, so it was even more challenging to be inclusive to achieve a common goal.

Looking back, this could have been avoided earlier. I will work with the appropriate colleagues to ensure that learning takes place within the team's management structures.

Action Plan

To avoid a situation happening like this again, I believe that there is an opportunity to detect early signs of conflict within teams. I believe that the key to this lies within the intelligence data we already gather, such as engagement surveys. I will endeavour to work with the relevant colleagues, such as the Business Intelligence Team, to explore this. For me personally, this will require me to improve my data analysis skills.

Development Plan

What do I want/need to learn?	What will I do to achieve this?	What resources or support will I need?	What will my success criteria be?	Target dates for review and completion
I need to refine my own stress-management techniques to ensure that I remain objective and professional throughout challenging situations.	I will attend the 6 week ‘stress-control’ course provided by my employer I will keep a professional journal detailing my experiences and emotions	Study leave allowance from manager (1 hour per week for 6 weeks)	I will proactively recognise my triggers I will be able to remain objective and will be able to separate emotional and professional responses	1st March 2025
Review absence management and performance management policies at PATCH	I will research best practice, using the CIPD’s guidance as a starting point I will ensure that both policies are up to date and in line with current legislation	Access to CIPD/ACAS 1 hour at Trustee meeting Time (6 hours) to deliver training sessions/comms to stakeholders	The organisation will have up to date staffing policies in line with current legislation	30th May 2024
Expand financial knowledge and gain deeper understanding of the financial responsibilities of a charity trustee	I will spend half a day shadowing the Treasurer I will prepare and present the Treasurers report at the July board meeting	Time (3 hours) Support from the Treasurer Support from other Trustees and staff	I will have a deeper understanding of the technicalities that surround financial reporting for our charity I will have prepared and presented the financial report to the board of Trustees	15th July 2024
Read widely on the topic of ‘feedback loops’ and plan three different scenarios where feedback loops can be used effectively	I will read widely on the topic, using peer reviewed journals where appropriate I will consult with my immediate colleagues and the Communications Team	Support and time (30 minutes per week) from line manager	I will have planned three different scenarios where feedback loops could be utilised	1st December 2024
I will explore how our current data and intelligence can detect early signs of conflict within teams	I will spend time working with the Business Intelligence team, asking questions and being curious. I will list all of the current intelligence-gathering exercises we use	I will need to be released from my current role for 2 hours per month and have that time protected. I will need access to current data sets	I will have a richer understanding of the data already held and will be able to detect potential signs of conflict within teams	1st February 2025

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