THE
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Care, Concern, Compassion

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KINDNESS AND COMPASSION
Challenges in Leadership Roles

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The aim of the lecture was to highlight the challenges faced by organisational leaders who have a desire to implement and develop compassion and kindness into their culture, sub-culture and practices. The lecture commenced with an overview of the definitions of kindness and a brief introduction to the research methodological approach.

The analytical model utilised was the conceptual analysis approach which briefly consists of a three-stage approach, the first identifying the concepts related to particular words and to discover whether there are general linguistic lexicon and definitions agreement regarding the particular word or words being examined. The second stage looks at the conceptual attributes given to the definition and the values attached to the attributes looking at different models and perspectives of meaning through the philosophical, historical, sociological, psychological and cultural development. The third stage of the conceptual analysis approach is to examine whether the differences or agreements regarding definitions and attributes impacts on practical applications and it is at this stage that either archive or field work needs to be undertaken.

In the context of the lecture the definition of kindness was taken from Cambridge English Dictionary (please refer to slides) and synonyms were taken from the Oxford Thesaurus. This gave a definition of kindness which consists of compassion and the lecture then went on to look at the contours or attributes of kindness and compassion and their relation to family, to goodness, friendship, altruism, feelings, actions and their religious, philosophical and psychological understandings.

Having established the definition of kindness, compassion and their attributes and the differences of opinions regarding definitions and their applications in different contexts the lecture went on to link compassion activity as context-based leadership. Leadership roles are context based and although there are many models from heroic, magnetic, hierarchical, distributive, steward, servant, transformative, collaborative, autocratic and sustainable models, there is no model of leadership that can be applied singularly to every contextual situation. The reality indicates that different attributes of each of the models are applied depending on their situational specific

requirements. The idea of a leader being purely heroic, purely autocratic or purely a steward is difficult to both define and find in practice and there is little evidence where support as a single model is applied.

However, in an organisational context, there are some essential requirements in the environment in order for the leader to apply whatever role or aspects of the role is considered fit for purpose. In the lecture, the emphasis was on a good organisational context and so there is a value judgement here but the literature review suggest that good organisations need the following five concepts to be activated and implemented for the organisation to be considered "good". These five are:

- Staff engagement with the organisation
- Organisational culture and organisational sub-culture, neither can really operate without the other
- Organisational values either explicit within the culture or implicit within the sub-culture
- Motivation of staff at all levels, status and responsibilities within the organisation
- Trust – defined as the value used in the University of central Lancashire as relying on each other, showing respect and integrity in all of the actions undertaken by staff.

If a "good" organisation requires these five elements to be considered effective and leadership roles are contextual then the question arises; what are the challenges to the application of kindness and compassion in leadership?

The main challenge based on the analysis of the literature is the difficulty with contextualising kindness and compassion within or on to a hierarchical structure. Leaders need followers and sometimes the leader can be a good leader in a poor context. For example, autocratic bullying, creating a sense of the "other" to engender a system of competition, or participating aggressively in league tables so the organisation is seen as "better" than another organisation and so on. It is difficult for leaders to try and contextualise kindness and compassion within their own leadership style if the style itself is seen as command and control, top down, egocentric or heroic. Equally the hierarchical structure itself may create difficulty for kindness or compassion to be ascribed to the leaders by the followers because of the hierarchical status that may be required to be demonstrated in organisational and cultural behaviours, processes or rewards (for example larger offices, bigger cars, titles, support, salaries and so on). If there is poor staff engagement or lack of trust in the hierarchical system itself then this presents a huge challenge for leaders who want to promote kindness and compassion.

The second difficulty is traditionalism. The sense that masculine, heroic power structures self-select leaders and self-select succession planning which are institutionalised. This is a model widely practised in the corporate world and it is very challenging for leaders who wish to promote a more transformative or engaging form of leadership. The lecture provided some evidence-based data suggesting that companies with women on their Boards or with women leaders (the feminisation of power structures) has some beneficial effect on share prices, productivity and outcomes.

The lecture also shared data which showed that organisations with more compassionate and kind approaches to leadership had a longer time period to reach

the same productivity as organisations which are more command and control led but within a period of a few months (up to 36 months) they reach similar productivity, efficiency and effectiveness but have less costs attributed to lower staff turnover, hiring of staff and retention of staff.

Kindness and compassion in practice requires commitment by the leader, organisation and staff at all levels around certain key contextual attributes. All are interlinked and all have an influence and impact on each other in a positive or negative way.

One attribute is health and wellbeing (the physical, mental and emotional health of the individual). This can be related to resilience and overall fitness to take on leadership roles. Poor health and wellbeing leads to less tolerance of others, of different views and less patience. This is related to the next attribute which is time. Most organisations in the modern world go through periods of uncertainty, the shorter the period of uncertainty the higher the level of engagement and staff efficiency and effectiveness. The longer the period of uncertainty then the higher the chances that efficiency, effectiveness and productivity will be negatively affected. The same thing applies to health and wellbeing. The longer the level of uncertainty the higher the chance of poor health physically, mentally or emotionally. Individuals have different resilience so some leaders will have a higher level of physical, mental and emotional stamina but there will be a point where fatigue does affect cognitive processes, decision making and judgement.

The longer the period of uncertainty the higher the impact on resilience and so time, is linked to the third attribute which is uncertainty. Uncertainty management can be simplified in general terms in two ways – either people's coping ability are improved and developed or the uncertainty is lowered to a level of more tolerance.

The final attribute is contemporary communications technology. This must not be confused with technology per se but specific to how organisations communicate internally and externally. The speed of data, amount and the time required to respond in today's mass communications technology does allow organisations to manage aspects of working well. But there is also evidence to show that mass communication leads to stereotyping of others, inauthenticity of responses, perceived rudeness, perceived harassment, bullying and intimidation and the paradox that participating in mass communications leads to some individuals feeling more isolated and lonelier. There are the modern phenomena's of trolling, fear of reputational damage and the historical archiving of electronic data which can potentially harm individuals later in their careers and lives.

Some organisations have tried to manage this area by having protocols which suggest that emails sent at night or evening are done through choice but no responses are expected, some have time delays on outgoing messages, others look at a small circulation list, less reliance on cc, copying others and some have even gone for email free days etc.

The focus, (in terms of the context of leadership and compassion) and attempts to manage mass communications is one form of employee engagement with the organisation and its leadership. Poor protocols, communication practices, demonstrations of not caring and sense of a lack of control on management due to the negative impacts of contemporary communications technology can undermine

health and wellbeing, levels of uncertainty, time management and resilience. See slides for diagrammatical presentation which attempts to demonstrate how these attributes influence and impact on each other.

The lecture ended with an overview which suggests that kindness and compassion in leadership are positive attributes which have a beneficial effect on individuals working in organisations but also on organisational culture, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. This will be a growing view of leadership as more evidence indicates the overall organisational fitness benefits such as leadership health, engagement with their communities and their customers, the sense of worth and engagement by staff and increased effectiveness and efficiencies.