

Shining the light on relationships

As leaders tackle the challenge of cultivating collaborations across the public sector [Dr Rachel Hawley](#) and [Professor Tony Wall](#) offer some tips to deepen your relationships at work.



Over the last decade public sector policy has pushed for collaboration as a lever for quality improvement. It marks a shift, away from ‘doing to’ people to ‘doing with’ people.

In our experience and research, deep relationships and trust depend on leaders’ relationships with them-selves, with others, and with their context.

Our experience points to some key principles to nurture deeper relationships:

1. Understand what motivates staff to be collaborative:

This is the curiosity around ways of working where leaders find ways to listen, reflect and experiment, encouraging self-understanding.

One way to do this is the opportunity for staff to tell their story. The act of ‘telling’ their story helps people establish a deep sense of their purpose - this roots people’s sense of purpose in self-understanding. The opportunity to share their story impacts positively on

leaders' motivations. This means 'hearing' and 'telling' stories in concise and engaging ways.

2. Spark engagement through creative conversations:

When leaders use creativity, they are helping to connect people to memories and significant events. It helps to move people's understanding of complex issues - such as integration, collaboration, co-production, and inclusion – from process to emotional connection.

Leaders' creativity shows up in a variety of ways - written, conversational, and visual - including for example, coaching and mentoring. Different conversations lead to different relationships. This requires time, and space and kindness.

3. Create time and space for reflection:

Leaders feel too often that there is inadequate time to reflect on their experiences, so making time to reflect is important to make sense of their experience. This kind of self-reflection supports resilience because it helps people discover a deep sense of their own purpose – and to understand the support needed to build and sustain collaborative ways of working.

Working in spaces with cultures of kindness challenges people to be self-aware and drives people to be attentive to each other.

4. Role model the principles and practices of collaboration:

Being a role model is testament to leaders' potential for transformation by shining the light on relationships to spark peoples' thoughts, emotions and actions over time. Role modelling collaborative relationships is about how we show up in every interaction, un-tapping shared understanding and connection – a sense of belonging.

At the heart of cultivating collaborative work relationships is the need to 'shine the light on relationships' despite the complexity surrounding it. Let us create the conditions that enable foster profound moments of connection and belonging.

Dr Rachel Hawley is Leadership Associate of the NHS Leadership Academy and founder of Change Comes From Within consulting. www.rachelhawley.uk **Professor Tony Wall** is Associate at The Conversation Company <https://theconversationcompany.co.uk/>