

Working Across Boundaries

One of the real barriers to excellent performance can develop when organisations retrench into competing fiefdoms, rather than seeing themselves as part of a coherent and well-functioning whole.

This often gets worse in tougher times where the “drawbridge” mentality can take hold as divisions compete hard for budget and people, close down the open exchange of information and move into a more fearful “survival” mentality.



I love working to help organisations work to help teams reopen drawbridges and work really effectively across departmental “boundaries”.

I completed a nine month assignment working with a group of leaders from several different functions, who lead a forward thinking [Housing Association in Cornwall: Coastline Housing](#).

I was asked by my colleagues at [Inspired2Learn](#) Barrie and Clare Smale, to co-design and deliver a series of six half day modules on leadership.

In close consultation with the client we developed modules on themes such as leadership purpose, values and style, emotional intelligence, building trust and motivating teams, communication skills, and working across boundaries, backed up by a budget of leadership coaching to support each participant and help the

application of the learning.

To design the modules on **cross boundary work**, I drew on my work and learning from “systemic practice”. This is the idea that organisations follow many of the principles of tightly connected systems, as for example, a family system, where strong loyalties can be harnessed for the common good, but where old arguments can sometimes get in our way.

Here’s what one participant said:

*“The session on working across boundaries led to positive action with another department, and improved working for staff in terms of IT system development. We resolved some **long standing** issues.”*

Our approach worked through 3 stages:

- Work on clarity of purpose for our own department and how we connect to others
- Explore and remind ourselves of the value of the other department – their purpose and value to the whole organisation
- Having a “courageous conversation” with each other to acknowledge each other’s strengths and then – and only then – start to explore how we want to work together in the future

I find that this “systemic approach” is a great way of unlocking longer standing issues, to release energy back into where it needs to go – providing excellent service to customers through a focused and healthy collaboration.

If you are interested in finding out more about “systemic practice” and how to apply it to organisation change, I can heartily recommend [Elspeth Campbell](#) and her team who ran a great Foundation programme for us last year.

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