

First-line supervisors workshop

A workshop equipping first-line leaders with the skills to build productive and inclusive teams.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Diversity and inclusion Leadership, development and learning Organisation including workforce
Organisation	Hertfordshire Constabulary
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Education
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2021
Scale of initiative	National

Key details

Target group	Adults General public Workforce
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Aim

The aims of the first-line leaders' workshop are to:

- develop frontline supervisors' knowledge and understanding of leadership processes and practices
- raise awareness and provide knowledge of the key factors affecting the wellbeing of themselves and their team members
- equip frontline supervisors with the knowledge and understanding to effectively deal with poor behaviour within their team
- motivate frontline supervisors to feel responsible and commit to improving the diversity attitudes within their teams

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- improve confidence in leadership skills
- enhance the impact of positive leadership
- strengthen leadership identity
- increase confidence in supporting teams' wellbeing
- improve the ability to address inappropriate behaviour
- increase responsibility for diversity and inclusion
- increase commitment to diversity and inclusion

Description

In 2021, a group of senior leaders who are part of National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) workforce portfolio collaborated with Durham University's Policing Research Unit to propose a

national pilot for a leadership, wellbeing, and inclusion intervention. A need to improve the attitudes and behaviours of police officers and staff was identified during a 2019 survey into diversity equality and inclusion in policing. The intention was to reduce prejudice and improving attitudes towards diversity.

In response, the NPCC supported the development of a training-based workshop intervention to improve first-line supervisors' capability, attitudes and motivation, building on shortfalls highlighted in other unconscious bias training. In addition to NPCC's support, £140,000 was raised from participant organisations to support a series of activities for developing an intervention. These included:

- a curriculum
- localised piloting of the intervention
- national train the trainer event
- development and dissemination workshops and conferences

The materials are freely available on request.

First-line supervisors workshop

The workshop is supported by a robust theoretical and evidence-based framework, drawing on key insights from the national diversity, equality and inclusion in policing survey, the national police wellbeing survey and self-determination theory. The workshop is built on a philosophy that participants, as expert policing practitioners, are active in their own learning. Recognising their depth of experience, the workshop encourages participants to critically evaluate the evidence and theories presented to them, empowering them to decide how – and if – the material can enhance their leadership practice. The evidence presented essentially helps frontline supervisors to consider how they can create effective, healthy working environments. The workshop content includes:

- concepts of supportive leadership
- workplace engagement

- wellbeing
- the psychology of inclusion and exclusion including leader member exchange
- the reactance-suppression-antagonism cycle
- workplace harms and aggressions

This approach is reinforced by fostering an environment where learning is 'choice fully motivated', supported by self-determination theory and using coaching tools. Instead of feeling obligated or coerced, participants are encouraged to engage, driven by a sense of ownership over their professional development. The workshop is underpinned by the assumption that when learning is 'choice fully motivated' rather than obligated, it becomes more impactful. By treating participants as knowledgeable experts who engage with the material on their own terms, the workshop supports both critical thinking and meaningful integration of new insights to their leadership roles and identities.

To support this autonomy, the workshop is facilitated by two to three mid- to senior-ranking officers or equivalent staff members, guiding discussions among approximately 20 delegates. This format fosters an environment of open dialogue and collaborative learning. The workshop adopts a novel approach to content delivery, moving away from traditional 'content-coverage' methods that rely heavily on classroom presentations. Instead, it emphasises communicating the evidence-base while encouraging self-reflection and meaningful conversations among colleagues about the relevance of the material in developing their leadership practices. The workshop was originally designed as a five-day intervention, however, more recent developments in Lancashire Constabulary have shortened this timeframe. Indicative costs for running a session will include a suitable venue which provides delegates psychological space away from their workplace, any catering, and the suitable investment in credible facilitators. The materials are freely available on request.

A key component of this approach is creating a sense of 'psychological safety,' where participants feel secure in raising concerns, asking questions, and sharing their thoughts without fear of negative repercussions. To cultivate this safe space, the workshops are designed to take place outside of police premises, and participants are encouraged not to wear uniforms or any insignia that signifies rank. This intentional removal of hierarchical markers helps to reinforce the notion that everyone's input is valued equally, further empowering participants to engage actively in their

learning experience.

The workshop is designed to encourage participants to find answers for themselves and explore their understanding of key components of leadership. This is achieved through the use of open-ended questions, rather than providing fixed answers. Participants are supported in developing their leadership knowledge through meaningful discussions with colleagues and opportunities for self-reflection.

Research shows that when learning is motivated by choice rather than obligation, it becomes more impactful. By integrating these elements, the workshop not only enhances individual ownership of learning but also fosters a collaborative environment where participants can critically assess and apply new insights to their leadership roles, ultimately strengthening their ability to lead and support their teams effectively.

Evaluation

An evaluation led by academics at Durham University assessed the implementation and impact of the workshops, focusing on changes in specific measures over time. Broadly, these measures included:

- Self-efficacy: Participants' perceived competence in leadership skills and knowledge, including their ability to support the wellbeing of their team members and address inappropriate behaviour.
- Responsibility: The individual belief that one is personally obligated to drive constructive change to improve diversity attitudes and behaviours within their teams.
- Commitment: A participant's dedication and sense of responsibility toward fostering positive diversity attitudes within their team.

To assess these areas, pre- and post-workshop surveys were administered to test a range of psychological factors across participating forces. These survey instruments were designed and validated specifically for police forces, ensuring both reliability and validity, and were administered under controlled conditions. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d statistic, allowing for a robust statistical evaluation of the intervention's impact.

Overall impact

Research findings support the effectiveness of the intervention to enhance first-line supervisors' leadership skills, and improve their capability, motivation and commitment to enhance wellbeing and improve diversity attitudes and reduce inappropriate behaviour.

The evaluation shows statistically significant positive impact across several outcome factors:

- An increase in confidence in leadership skills (large effect size)
- An increase in knowledge of the impact of their leadership behaviours on their team members (medium effect size)
- An increase in leadership identity (medium effect size)
- An increase in confidence to support the wellbeing of their team members (medium effect size)
- Among police officers an increase in confidence to deal with inappropriate behaviour (medium effect size)
- Among police staff an increase in confidence to deal with inappropriate behaviour (large effect size)
- An increase in feeling responsible to improve diversity attitudes and behaviours of team member (medium effect size)
- An increase in commitment to improving diversity attitudes in their teams (medium effect size)

Currently, four forces (Durham, Hertfordshire, Thames Valley and North Wales) have fully adopted the intervention, whilst others, such as Cambridgeshire, have implemented specific elements. By July 2024, it is estimated that a version of the workshop has been delivered to 2,775 police officers and staff across participating forces, including:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary: 799 participants
- Cambridgeshire Constabulary: 270 participants
- Thames Valley Police: 478 participants
- North Wales Police: 329 participants
- Durham Constabulary: 403 participants
- Lancashire Constabulary: 496 participants

Learning

Customisation of learning materials

Other police forces can benefit from emphasising aspects of the core learning materials to align with their unique strategic objectives. This flexibility allows for a more relevant and impactful learning experience.

Emphasising psychological safety

Creating an environment of psychological safety is crucial for fostering open communication and trust among participants. Police forces should prioritise strategies that encourage employees to express concerns and share ideas without fear of negative repercussions, ultimately enhancing engagement and learning.

Face-to-face interaction

Evidence suggests that face-to-face workshops are generally more effective than online formats for the type of interactive and reflective learning promoted in these sessions. In-person engagement enables participants to build rapport, foster trust, and create a sense of psychological safety, all of which are essential for open communication and effective learning. Police forces should prioritise in-person workshops whenever possible to maximise these benefits.

Continued research and evaluation

While the workshops have shown promise in changing motivations, further research is necessary to fully understand the relationship between these changes and long-term behavioural shifts. Other police forces should consider establishing mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of such workshops over time, tracking both individual and organisational outcomes.

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