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Acas  
Workplace  
TRENDS

2016



# Workplace trends 2016

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## Introduction

### Sir Brendan Barber, Acas Chair



*Brendan Barber is  
Chair of Acas*

This is the second report Acas has produced identifying some of the trends we think will impact on the workplace in the coming year. Predicting the future is, of course, fraught with difficulty but some of the developments that are likely to have an effect on employment relations in 2016 are, I think, already discernable.

In our report last year we identified **labour productivity** as a matter of real concern to the UK economy and it is an issue likely to remain high on the agenda during 2016. The Government certainly see it very much as a top priority as was made clear in their report on the subject published in July last year. After a long period of stagnation, UK productivity has recently begun to pick up. But, in relative terms, we still remain a long way behind our major international

competitors. Getting the UK productivity levels up to those of the likes of Germany and the United States will not be easy. However the potential rewards are considerable, with the Government estimating that if we could match the productivity of the US this would equate to around £21,000 per annum for every household in the UK.

What happens inside the workplace will have a big part to play in improving productivity and in 2015 Acas published an [influential report](#) setting out the 'seven levers' which it feels can make a positive difference to workplace productivity. Looking to 2016, we will continue to work with stakeholders and organisations to promote and refine our thinking in this respect. Later on in this report Gill Dix, Acas Head of Strategy, considers the underlying values of Acas' perspective on productivity by looking at some companies Acas has worked with recently.

**Pay**, and in particular the new National Living Wage, is likely to be a major issue in the minds of many organisations during 2016. The announcement of a new National Living Wage by the Chancellor in his 2015 summer budget came as something of a surprise to most commentators. Although welcomed by many, the proposal has met with concern, most particularly from some employer bodies, questioning how the new rate of £7.20 would be afforded. There is no doubt its impact will be widely felt. Joint research from CIPD/Resolution Foundation reveals that over half of all employers reckon their wage bills will be affected by the new wage, whilst in sectors such as hospitality and retail this percentage rises to over three quarters. At the moment it seems that many employers will be looking to pay for the National Living Wage through increased efficiency/productivity but some will no doubt respond by raising prices and/or reducing head-count.

For the first time in a generation, **collective employment relations** are once again back in the headlines. The new Trade Union Bill, which is currently being considered by Parliament, looks set to transform aspects

of collective relations, including the law on industrial action. The Bill has aroused strong feelings. Whilst the Government see it as a necessary modernisation and reform, opponents claim it is a direct attack on trade unions and a solution looking for a problem. Speculation is rife on what the precise impact of the new law will be on the future of workplace relations but, whatever the impact, good communication will be vital to managing the new relationship between employers and trade unions and employee representatives. How to communicate and the challenges it poses are two issues addressed in this report by David Prince, Acas Chief Conciliator, and Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the TUC.

**Workplace bullying** is never far from the headlines these days and there are worrying signs that it is on the increase. Last year over 20,000 calls were taken by the Acas helpline on bullying and harassment with some people reporting truly horrifying incidents including humiliation, ostracism, verbal and physical abuse. Anti-bullying policies are pretty widespread in Britain's workplaces but it seems fairly clear that they are falling short in reducing the overall prevalence of this form of unwanted behaviour. Tackling bullying will of course involve effective anti-bullying policies but it will also need managers being alert to unwanted behaviours and having good people skills to know how and when to intervene. Also important are agreed standards of what acceptable and unacceptable behaviours should look like, and senior leaders able and willing to act as role models for these standards. Susan Clews, Acas Chief Operations Officer, looks at these issues in more detail in the pages that follow and there is also a case study from Dr Makani Purva, newly appointed 'Anti-Bullying Tsar' at Hull NHS Trust looking at how to change a workplace culture.

The huge changes that we have seen in the nature of working life in recent years look set to continue during the course of the coming year. **Zero-hours contracts** have faded somewhat from media attention in recent months but their use continues to grow. The Office for National Statistics now estimates that there are some 744,000 workers in the UK working on contracts that guarantee no minimum hours. Whilst this only represents some 2.4 per cent of the total UK workforce, it is still 19 per cent up on the previous year's figure and does seem to suggest that zero-hours contracts will remain a significant feature of the workplace for some years to come. And the use of **agency workers, and the outsourcing of products and services** also continue to feature significantly in the British workplace. Such 'non-standard' working arrangements may indeed become a standard feature of the labour market as we look to the future, and the challenge is making sure they work for the benefit of both the organisation and the individual. For sure, such arrangements require careful management. The general issue of management is one that is addressed by Anne Sharp, Acas Chief Executive, later on in this report and also by Steve Elliott from the Chemical Industries Association. Both give their own personal takes on what it takes to be a good manager and leader.

These are just a few thoughts on what 2016 might hold. As I said at the beginning, predicting the future is not easy and undoubtedly there will be surprises and even shocks as we go through the year. But I hope that this report give you some thoughts to consider alongside your New Year resolutions.

# 1. Workplace trends 2016: how to lead?

## How Acas spells 'leadership'

Anne Sharp



*Anne Sharp is Chief Executive of Acas*

Many people reading this article will be leaders in some form or another. Being a leader is not just about being head of an organisation: leaders are people at all levels who model the right behaviours, influence people for the better and communicate effectively.

I am fortunate enough to lead a specialist public sector organisation. Our specialism is often seen by others as focused on conflict resolution, but we see ourselves as focused on behaviour: we know how behaviour makes a difference in preventing conflict, increasing workplace effectiveness and improving the quality of working life. We also know which behaviours and strategies contribute to high quality dispute resolution. One of our greatest challenges is to influence more people and businesses to adopt these behaviours. That's what makes us leaders in the field of workplace relations.

Of course leadership is multi-faceted, but from a personal *and* an Acas perspective, four components stand out for me: **A**uthenticity, **C**ommunication, **A**uthority and **S**ervice.

### ***Authenticity***

People can spot an insincere leader a mile off, so authenticity is a crucial quality. Authentic leaders model behaviours that reflect and support organisational values. They demonstrate through their actions and decisions that values are not just words on the wall.

Being an effective and authentic leader involves having understanding and control of your own emotions and an awareness of the impact they have on others. Such **emotional intelligence** is likely to be an area of growing interest over the next year or so, particularly amongst HR professionals. It centres on the capacity to reason about emotions and emotional information, an important part of effective communication and influence.

### ***Communication***

The way we communicate has been one of the great changes in my working life. To take just one example, **social media** today presents opportunities and challenges which were unimaginable 30 years ago. While it provides great possibilities for sharing and receiving information between colleagues and for connecting with customers, it also poses risks if the framework for acceptable use is unclear. And while social media now offers greater flexibility than emails, there is no effective substitute in some situations for talking face-to-face.

As technology drives the changes in the nature of many workplaces from a single location to home-based or global teams, leaders face ever more challenges in harnessing the power of modern communication channels while retaining the best of the old ways. There are some surprising aspects of this: at the simplest of levels, a hand-written thank you card is now a much more powerful way of telling someone you value them than it used to be.

### ***Authority***

One of the characteristics of effective senior leaders is an authority which secures the respect and confidence of others. This is often based on expertise, foresight and judgement and enables them to act effectively themselves and to support others in acting at the right time and in the right way.

In its operational work Acas frequently sees the consequences of not acting early enough to address conflict. For many organisations, embedding better ways of **managing conflict** before it gets locked into formal processes remains a prize for the future. Securing this prize depends on honest, sound and steady communication and trust at an individual and organisational level. This is not just about senior leaders – front line managers need to have the confidence, skills and capacity to spot and manage difficult situations. Investing in the development of these front line managers is one of the most enduring themes raised both in our research and our operational activity.

### ***Service***

Acas services may traditionally be seen by many as playing the part of the referee in a boxing match. But nothing could be further from the reality. Our role is not about imposing solutions, it is about supporting organisations and individuals to find solutions for themselves. Long-term success for us is spreading understanding and growing the capacity within organisations to resolve issues productively without external intervention from Acas. This sometimes needs a leap of confidence – in this context, I was struck by Steve Elliott's comment on the need for leaders to be brave.

Our work to support organisations in taking a new approach to solving workplace issues also has a parallel with personal leadership, providing the long-term value and the satisfaction of increasing the capability and effectiveness of others. As any individual leader knows, lasting success is not about personal position, but about serving your organisation so that it is stronger when you move on than it was when you arrived.

So what can leaders expect in the future? In some ways, more of the same – tough decisions that don't necessarily make them popular – and questioning and challenging 'followers' – who rightly expect them to demonstrate the behaviours they ask of others. But in the end, it comes back to my opening remark: leadership isn't about just one person, it's about the power of people at all levels effectively and consistently communicating and demonstrating shared values and behaviours.

## Leadership and productivity

Steve Elliott



*Steve Elliott is Chief Executive of the Chemical Industries Association*

Since the beginning of the year 2000, productivity in the UK chemical industry – measured by production volume divided by hours worked – has increased by 46 per cent, outpacing the 32 per cent productivity improvements in the European Union chemical sector as whole over the same period.

An impressive headline – and even more so when one considers that much of this period of time has seen manufacturing's share of the UK economy continue to contract and ownership of UK chemical businesses increasingly shift into the hands of overseas headquartered companies and/or private equity. And whilst it's true that the same period of time has seen a reduction in the number of UK chemical industry jobs, during my time as the Chief Executive of the Chemical Industries Association (CIA) I have witnessed examples of truly inspirational leadership at both the factory-floor and board-room level that give real meaning to the positive but dry performance data.

At one end of the spectrum, a UK chemical manufacturer – producing key building blocks for the paper, ceramics, transport and energy sectors – investing in 190 years of combined employee experience to deliver £500,000 bottom-line improvements to the business over a two-year period, successfully tackle fluctuating currency rates, rising raw material and energy costs and competition from low cost economies.

At the other end, a number of chemical industry CEOs coming together to establish a Chemistry Growth Partnership (CGP) with the collective ambition of building a competitive long-term future for the sector, its future employees, customers, local communities and the country.

Having witnessed both the individual and collective approach to productivity improvement at close hand, I am struck by three common success factors based around leadership: **first, the commitment, clarity and consistency of direction** and related action employed by senior leaders in charting future ambition; **second, the significance of leadership at every level** of an organisation in delivering on that ambition; and **third, the "bravery"** often required at all levels of responsibility to deliver results.

Taking these success factors in turn, the Chief Executives and senior directors in the UK chemical industry that have formed the Chemistry Growth Partnership, have come together voluntarily and identified a 2030 vision for the sector, backed up by specific individual and collective actions and responsibilities. In partnership with the trade unions and Government, this collective leadership body has been working since late 2013 to secure a business climate that will help deliver long-term sustainable jobs, in parts of the country that sorely need them, through

ever-more competitive plants, processes, products and, of course, people. That's not about changing course every quarter or every government but it is about constant reference to the group's original strategy and related goals and remaining true to them.

Turning to leadership throughout organisations, our chemical company example acknowledged that it needed external advice and support if it was going to improve its productivity and beat the competition. The answer lay in HFL Consulting who, since the early 2000s had worked directly with CIA in addressing manufacturing excellence, leading to their acquisition of the Process Industries Centre for Manufacturing Excellence (PICME) from CIA back in 2006. The company worked with HFL in empowering a cross-functional team of technicians, chemists, engineers, managers and planners to not only identify the challenges with their plant control system but to develop and own the solutions to improve the way batches were processed. Linking the project to a nationally recognised qualification for all those taking part further enhanced productivity improvement, with team members recognising the company's investment in their individual futures.

This leads me to perhaps the most personal observation around leadership – that of the bravery often required but rarely acknowledged in delivering results. The easiest response for our individual chemical company could have been to “lie low”, to accept the low cost competition as inevitable defeat and to impose a solution from on-high, focused more on cost-minimisation than investment in the future. Equally, it would be far easier for our CEOs and senior directors to stick to their day-to-day responsibilities opposite shareholders, overseas owners and financial institutions, rather than sticking their heads above the parapet by committing to collective long-term growth projects with no immediate return, such as the CGP. In neither example was that easy option taken, despite the many pressures.

There remains much to be done. Within my own organisation we are currently grappling with a five-year growth plan which will require the very same leadership attributes and culture displayed by our two examples. More broadly I also believe we have to work much harder as an industry to attract and retain our future leaders, better reflecting the UK's diverse population.

And one final reflection on bravery, for too long the chemical industry has hidden away from the spotlight, either concerned over its reputation or undervaluing the contribution it makes to the economy and society at large. True leadership must see the sector proactively engage with both its supporters and detractors if we are to secure our place at the heart of the UK's economic future.



## 2. Workplace trends 2016: how to communicate?

### We are all experts: the tricky art of communication

David Prince



*David Prince is Chief Conciliator at Acas*

Communication is an essential ingredient for happy and productive workplaces. But as the way we communicate continues to be revolutionised by social media and working patterns, what does my experience as Acas Chief Conciliator tell me about the challenges that lie ahead, for employers, employees and employee representatives, and how we can respond?

We all feel that we are good communicators and with good reason: it is something many of us do all day, every day. And many of us are beginning to adapt to using different channels such as blogs, tweets and social networking sites. **So this is my first point.** Trust your instincts: we all instinctively know how we should interact with one another and the fundamentals don't change.

The trouble is, of course, that everything around us is changing and presents some very tricky questions. For example, as the threat/promise of workplace automation grows, just how do you communicate with a robot? And when a workplace has employees working for half a dozen different employers, due to outsourcing, how do you logistically get everyone round the same table, let alone singing from the same hymn sheet? How does communication work in the gig economy, when some employees may be appearing in your office for 'one night only' before moving on?

And finally, in many diverse workplaces '4G' is far from uncommon. So again, how do you tailor your communication to people with different needs and expectations of work?

**My second point is:** take a moment to stand back and see the big picture. Effective communication is about creating a breathing space. At Acas, this may mean putting the parties to a dispute in separate rooms as a precursor to official talks. For an employee representative it may take the form of having an informal chat with a general manager or director to share thoughts and ideas.

Unfortunately, much of the research tells us that inside the workplace, the opportunities to ensure that all parties develop an informed sense of perspective are becoming less widespread. Many workplaces are interpreting communication in a much narrower way than was true in the past. Increasingly, it means sending emails and the emphasis is on one way, rather than two-way communication. But we must not neglect the value of dialogue and sharing perspectives using 'face-to-face' communication.

**Key point number three** is to be very clear about the information you convey. This was brought home to me during a dispute in the transport industry. Information had been provided by management in a format that was not understood by the union representatives. As a result assumptions were made and a pay demand was submitted based on the misleading perceptions. An Acas analysis of the parties' positions clearly identified that different data was being used due to a seasonal variation of staffing levels. By discussing the figures and how they were produced with the parties, Acas was able to break the deadlock and conciliation proceeded to a successful conclusion.

But perspectives are also highly dependent on timing (**fourth point**). When you start the conversation is critical, particularly when it concerns significant organisational change such as new work practices or potential redundancies. Communicate too soon and people may be left in limbo and their imaginations can run riot; communicate too late and all those ideas for how to resolve problems don't get chance to flex their muscles. We must not allow information to be used as a source of power but, rather, provide the basis for real understanding between parties.

**Finally**, even huge collective negotiations often come down to a few people sitting round a table and trying to reach a compromise. There have been some good examples of these kinds of compromises in the past – for example, where trade unions and employers used 'concessionary bargaining' during the recession to save jobs *and* make savings – and there are signs that this will be equally important in the future. I have certainly noticed a growing and very welcome preoccupation with 'mutually beneficial' outcomes on the part of employers and employee representatives.

To use the cliché, it's about creating 'win-win' outcomes. But as Anne Sharp points out in her article on leadership, communication is not just about sharing the good news. It is certainly easier to work your way through difficult periods if you make communication a strategic priority – which means that everyone knows how it works and what part they play.

**If I could only make one point** about what the past may teach us about the year ahead, it's that we need to ensure that we differentiate between communication, consultation and negotiation (and let's not make the latter a dirty word). They are very different but often operate on the same spectrums, ideally designed to improve relationships, resolve problems, and boost productivity and skills.

Joint problem-solving is central to our collaborative approach at Acas but my experience tells me that being proactive can work best: which means working on positive behaviours and building the right workplace cultures. This is something that is discussed in more detail by my colleague Susan Clews and Dr Makani Purva with their focus on bullying and workplace behaviours.

## Giving voice to a better way of working

Frances O'Grady



*Frances O'Grady is General Secretary of the TUC*

David Prince begins his article by making the obvious, but important, point that communication is an essential ingredient of happy and productive workplaces.

I couldn't agree more. But I also know that in far too many workplaces, communication is a one-way street, with the emphasis placed on managers conveying information to staff. Communication is something done to staff, rather than something which actively engages them, and which gives them an opportunity shape and influence their working lives.

It's a phenomenon identified in a recent report into the state of Britain at work, authored by Ed Sweeney, the former chair of Acas, which noted that, '*[According to the European Participation Index], only Lithuania performs worse than the UK on the measure of worker involvement in the governance of the workplace*'.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a record to be proud of and is, I believe, one of the key reasons why the UK has such a poor record on productivity, because study after study has shown that effective staff engagement makes for better, more rewarding, more productive workplaces.

So what can be done to improve communication at work?

My first suggestion is perhaps an obvious one for someone who leads the TUC to make – put simply, employers, politicians and policy makers need to recognise the value of unions and collective bargaining. We know from our recent experience in sectors such as automotive that having a strong union voice can result in the genuine 'win-win' arrangements that David refers to in his article. I worry that this positive approach to trade unions and collective bargaining, sits uneasily with the Trade Union Bill currently making its way through the legislative process – but I believe it's an approach given weight by the practical experience of unions working positively with employers across the public and private sectors.

Of course, not every workplace is unionised. So my second suggestion would be that we also need to think hard about how we make the Information and Consultation Regulations (ICE) work much more effectively. Simplifying the ICE Regulations, making them easier for workers to invoke, and allowing unions the right to nominate ICE reps, would all require a political commitment. But in the meantime, there may be scope for employers and unions to work together to reinvigorate the Regulations even in their current inadequate form. Can we work together to make sure that employee reps get the training, support and independent advice they need if they are to engage in these processes in

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<sup>1</sup> [Making Work Better: An Agenda for Government](#), The Smith Institute, 2014

a meaningful way? Can we develop best practice to ensure ICE mechanisms are genuine forums for consultation, not just talking shops?

I would go further still – and this is my third suggestion. There is real scope to learn from the experience from across mainland Europe, which demonstrates the value of workers having a real say in the strategic decisions that impact on them and the organisations they work for. Workers in 19 European countries have the right to have a voice in corporate governance, and in 14 of the countries these rights extend across the public and private sector. Extending these provisions to the UK would not only help to give workers real voice, but would hopefully also address the chronic short-termism that is so prevalent across UK PLC, and which prioritises short-term shareholder value above all else. Ensuring workers had a voice on executive remuneration committees might be a good start – and would help address public concerns about the ever growing gap between shop-floor and boardroom pay.

My final suggestion would be this. Let's acknowledge that good communication in the workplace doesn't happen by accident. It requires a genuine commitment to engage. It requires skilled, confident line managers (and remember that at the moment some four in 10 line managers rate their own line manager as ineffective!). And from a union perspective it also requires skilled, confident, trained union representatives. Representing members with problems; resolving issues at work; working with employers to develop training and development opportunities; keeping workplaces safe and healthy; helping facilitate new ways of working – this is the sort of work union reps do day in, day out. But above all, their job is help to give a collective and independent voice to working people – essential if communication is to be more than the one-way street I described earlier.

At the TUC we are proud of the fact that we and our unions train around 65,000 workplace reps each year. Good employers play their part as well – working with unions to ensure reps can exercise their legal right to paid time off to train. Some of Britain's most successful companies and organisations are underpinned by that positive joint-working; a shared commitment to real voice and two-way communication at work.

I'd like to see that best practice, that better way of working spread as widely as possible. It's good for staff, good for employers, and good for Britain's workplaces.

### 3. Workplace trends 2016: how to behave?

#### Encouraging positive behaviours: tackling bullying at work

Susan Clews



*Susan Clews is Chief Operations Officer at Acas*

Disagreements are bound to feature, at one time or another, in almost every workplace. To an extent, this is only to be expected: we're all human after all, people have different viewpoints and expectations and we won't always agree with the words and actions of our colleagues or managers.

But when actions and words become unwelcome or unwanted behaviours, the climate can quickly deteriorate and demand a response. Disentangling what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour can feel difficult to define and to gauge in practice. Where that line lies may change depending on the context and the people involved. In Acas' experience, this can make the task of managing unwanted

behaviours difficult – and can invite a temptation to avoid dealing with behavioural concerns unless absolutely necessary.

What can't be avoided, however, are the heavy costs involved – for individuals and for businesses – where unwanted behaviours become a more commonplace feature of the workplace. Yet research suggests that as many as 40 per cent of us have experienced disrespectful or humiliating behaviour at work – from insults, rudeness and teasing, to shouting, intimidation and threats. So a huge number of us will have felt or seen first hand the ill-effects that such behaviours can have on individuals, as well as on team dynamics and performance.

Take bullying at work. This is usually understood as an extreme form of unwanted behaviour, but the steady demand for advice from the Acas Helpline on this topic – around 20,000 calls a year – indicates that it's a significant and persistent problem. It is also evident that it's a perennial issue – so why single this out as a workplace 'trend' for 2016?

Well, firstly, as a recent [Acas discussion paper](#) has highlighted, bullying appears to be on the increase in Britain's workplaces. A range of surveys all point to a steady rise over the last decade in grievances relating to bullying and harassment, which are also increasingly rated as a top five workplace hazard or concern. At the same time, we know anti-bullying policies are widespread in Britain's workplaces. But what is clear is that anti-bullying policies are not necessarily enough on their own.

Just as vital is the overall organisational climate in which those policies operate. Put simply, policies will only work effectively if people have the confidence to use them. This is more likely where the workplace culture provides a shared sense of responsibility that unacceptable behaviours

can and should be reported, and then dealt with appropriately, whenever they are experienced or witnessed.

I acknowledge that identifying unwanted behaviours, such as bullying, can be difficult. But creating clear standards for what constitute acceptable behaviours should be a feature of all workplaces. This involves developing a focused strategy geared towards ensuring worker wellbeing and fostering positive behaviours. It makes sense for standards to be developed with the involvement of employees and role-modelled by senior managers.

Sometimes, environmental factors can contribute to a climate conducive to negative behaviours, including bullying. These can include poor job design, work intensification, job stress and job insecurity. But as we look ahead to 2016, one finding in our recent paper especially resonates: the strong correlation between restructuring and organisational change and increased rates of workplace bullying. This would seem to be particularly the case where change is driven by cost and productivity considerations.

Change may be an inevitable, and indeed positive, force at work. But managing change constructively is equally one of our great challenges. With the UK's 'productivity puzzle' still high on the agenda, a key priority for 2016 must be to ensure that good people management is at the heart of any change programme. Acas' guidance and practical support on "the seven levers of workplace productivity" – discussed later in this report – will have an important role to play across all sectors. The public sector may face particular demands as the backdrop of fiscal constraints create changing job demands, increased workloads and new targets, all of which, if not managed well, can create stress and provide fertile ground for bullying. Sensitive and inclusive change management must therefore be high on the list of priorities for the UK's workplaces in the coming year.

We know that there are some excellent examples of good practice to share and the case study that follows – from Dr Makani Purva, the Anti-Bullying Tsar at Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust – provides a practical illustration of how bullying can be addressed through measures aimed at building a positive workplace culture.

I know that tackling and preventing bullying is a complex and difficult challenge for an organisation to get right. But we mustn't shy away from the task of halting, then reversing, the increasing trends associated with bullying. Our recent paper calls for an open debate on better solutions and I sincerely hope this will be a feature of 2016. This is not just a matter for policy makers – it's a discussion we need to see happening inside all our workplaces across the country.

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## The role of the Anti-Bullying Tsar in changing workplace culture

Dr Makani Purva



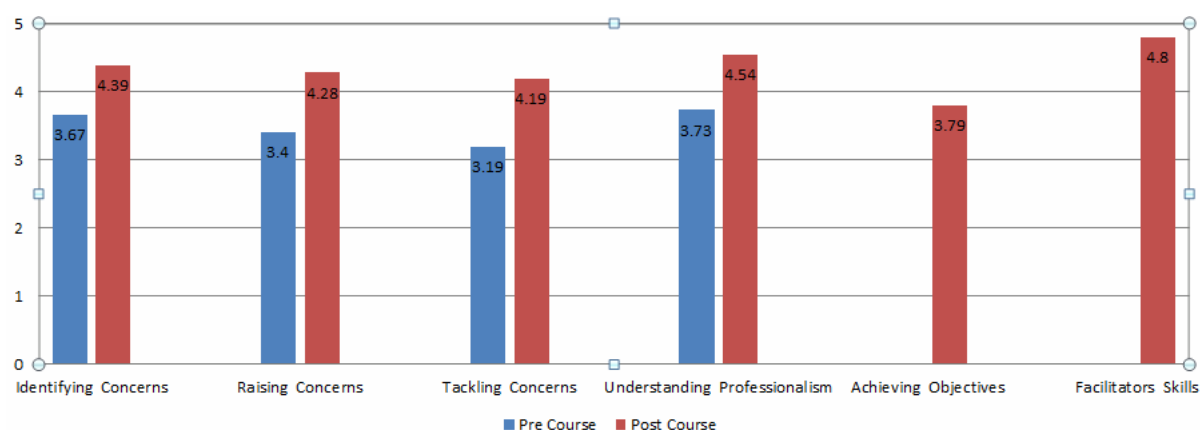
*Dr Makani Purva is Consultant Anaesthetist and Director of Medical Education at Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust. She is also the Anti-Bullying Tsar*

Our organisation was identified as having bullying issues in early 2014 following a visit from the Care Quality Commission. This was later confirmed by an independent Acas report. In response, a major overhaul of our senior management structure occurred and an anti-bullying group was established under the leadership of the new Chief Executive. I was appointed as the 'Anti-Bullying Tsar' in October 2014.

With the support of the Trust, I created the Professionalism and Culture Transformation (PACT) academy. The academy had three key objectives: to educate, intervene and influence the organisation to tackle unprofessional practices and, in the longer term, to effect a deeper cultural change.

The educational initiative took the form of a 90-minute interactive workshop designed to accommodate 20 staff at a time. It was structured around small group exercises, case studies and videos depicting bullying behaviours in the workplace. Over 4,000 staff have attended in less than a year.

The key objectives of the workshop were to ensure that staff understood what was meant by 'professionalism' and to be able to identify and tackle concerns of bullying behaviour. Attendees completed a pre- and post-course assessment of perceived 'confidence levels' in four areas and the improvements are significant (see first four columns).



The staff who attend our workshop feel more confident about tackling behaviours – indeed, bystander interventions is believed to be the single most powerful intervention needed to overcome unprofessionalism. This gives us confidence that our empowered staff will effect positive changes. As it was important to have an easily accessible way of raising concerns, we introduced a simple online reporting form on the intranet, which automatically reach the Anti-Bullying Tsar. Staff can also reach the Tsar

through email, phone or face-to-face. In this manner, over 130 cases have been reported and are being tackled.

I use various interventions, such as mediation and one-to-one feedback, to tackle inappropriate behaviour. As well as analysing individual situations, I draw upon the experience and expertise of others to help me. Frequently, the issue cannot be resolved by one person alone, but requires a wider team approach to improve deeper cultural practices. This takes time and though we have made advances, many underlying issues are still very much a work in progress.

To achieve our long-term vision, I have shifted the organisation's approach to bullying to make it more supportive of the victims. I work with consultant bodies and senior management teams to raise awareness and encourage role-modelling of professionalism. I have delivered workshops to human resources staff championing the voice of the bullied, raising self-awareness and challenging conventional HR practices.

To empower staff and ensure that our work is sustained, a new voluntary role was created – the 'professionalism champion'. Currently 50 members have signed up in various areas to take forward the work of the academy towards addressing negative behaviours in their individual workplaces and supporting positive cultural values.

My key reflections at the end of a year's work have been:

1. Staff facing bullying issues appreciate their **voices being heard** and their concerns acknowledged. In many cases, this is perhaps the most important step towards finding solutions.
2. Most bullying behaviours appear to manifest initially as **small acts of unprofessionalism** which left unchecked over time, transform into fully fledged bullying behaviours. Hence, tackling concerns early is a key preventative measure.
3. Finally, the most important realisation has been that **staff empowerment** is perhaps the key to transforming long-term behaviours and culture.

Along with the role of the Anti-Bullying Tsar, the trust has embarked on various complementary initiatives to help transform the organisational culture. And all of this appears to be paying off. The recent local Friends and Family Test Staff Survey attracted a record number of responses. In the past, engagement had been low, but now staff appear to be keen to tell us that things are moving in the right direction. Almost three-quarters of our staff said they were likely to recommend our care to loved ones and six out of 10 people said they are able to make improvements happen in their work areas; both of these scores ranking above the national average. Also, when the Care Quality Commission returned for a follow-up report in October 2015, they highlighted the positive role of the Anti-Bullying Tsar in effecting cultural change.



In conclusion, I believe that we have made a promising start but the real challenge will be to sustain in the long term, the behavioural and cultural changes effected so far. Only then we can return to being a patient-focused professional organisation with a positive culture and a happy workplace for staff to work in.

## 4. Workplace trends 2016: how to be productive?

### The psychology of productivity

Gill Dix



Each year, Acas works closely with hundreds of organisations to help improve their productivity. Our advisers are finding that more and more employers understand the benefits that come from looking within the workplace for solutions, as well as looking out at the wider business world. This means reflecting and acting upon, amongst other things, how work is organised, how skills are developed and how relationships are managed.

*Gill Dix is Head of Strategy at Acas*

Apart from splitting atoms, which is not the day job for most of us, you can't get more 'micro' or inward looking than deconstructing human behaviour. Yet psychology, and the significance of seeking to understand and inform future behaviour, is certainly one of the key themes to emerge from this report on future workplace trends. But other than both beginning with the letter 'p', what is the connection between psychology and productivity?

As we all know, Freud's concept of psychoanalysis is based on the idea that the personality is made up of three parts – the id, the ego and the super ego.

It would be disingenuous to imply that the founder of modern human psychology had a huge influence on the development of Acas' seven levers of productivity. But the three factors underpinning Acas' seven levers do resonate with Freud's framework:

#### Acas seven levers of productivity:

1. Well-designed work
2. Skilled managers
3. Effective conflict management
4. Clarity about rights and responsibilities
5. Fairness
6. Employee voice
7. High trust.

1. **values:** things like fairness, listening to each other and learning to trust (what Freud would have associated with the 'id', those almost instinctive qualities we all share)
2. **skills:** often most associated with how line managers implement policies and procedures, but also how they encourage creativity (this is the 'ego' of workplace life)
3. **processes:** these are the systems organisations put in place to tell people what to do and how to do it (this is the parental 'super ego' of the workplace).

Each workplace, like each individual personality, will be more wedded to one component than to another. They will be driven as much by history as current demands; and may well be influenced by where an organisation is on its growth curve.

For Acas, the key is helping organisations to get the balance right between their values, skills and processes. This isn't always easy. We all know of workplaces where abiding by the company policy is the strongest driver of behaviour. In an ever-changing employment world – with fragmenting workplaces and patterns of work and relationships revolutionised by new technology – achieving a sense of balance can be increasingly difficult.

Acas has worked with organisations of all sizes and in all sectors to help them recalibrate their priorities. In a **social care organisation**, Acas advisers found that over-elaborate processes for getting people into care was causing duplication of skills and eroding core values. By working with teams to get rid of bottlenecks, the working atmosphere was transformed and skills put to better use.

A **high tech small business** we worked with realised it needed to better promote and protect its core values in order to improve staff retention. Acas provided training to respond to employees calls for managers to be better listeners, to be fairer and to be more approachable.

At **YPO**, an organisation predominantly providing equipment and services to the education sector, the focus was very much on improving skills. This meant making better use of existing processes – particularly around communication and conflict management. Improved people management skills have led to greater trust and, as the HR Business partner said “high levels of engagement, which then leads to higher output.”

Of course, sometimes, it is not as straightforward as addressing one area of workplace life or practice. **Wiltshire Fire Service** (WFS) is a case in point. Facing a huge period of change – including merger with the Dorset Fire Service – the Service has had to address its values, skills and work processes all at once.

Over the years, WFS has tended to adopt values that reflect its historic role, as predominantly fire fighters, rather than its current role as, largely, facilitating fire prevention. This has meant changing the way the Service sees itself and the way it is perceived by the community. Old processes around disciplinary and grievance handling needed to be overhauled, and skills gaps, particularly around boosting line manager confidence, needed to be managed.

Like many organisations struggling to get the balance right, Wiltshire Fire Service sees itself on a journey, with the change programme being work in progress. But, along with the hundreds of organisations we work with, its experience shows that you can be both effective and fair if you are willing to reflect on how things are done, seek help where needed and take action.

Acas has developed a new productivity tool to help organisations assess how well balanced they are. You can find it at [www.acas.org.uk/productivity](http://www.acas.org.uk/productivity).