

Case study: a leadership team within Network Rail



humaninsight



“Qi was the evidence needed to unlock conversations”

How a leadership team within Network Rail shifted the level of psychological safety and inclusion, using the Quality of Interaction Index

The challenge of the organisation

Network Rail’s (NR) strategy of Putting Passengers First is a radical step change that addresses the polarity of delivering a better service whilst continuing to improve NR’s safety record. Over the past two years, there has been, and continues to be, many challenges to deliver the strategy including covid-19, organisational restructures, ongoing operational issues but more significantly, it required new ways of leading and different employee behaviours. NR needed to think differently about how people do their jobs and embed new habits that would deliver a safe service.

NR sought a team behaviour programme that would enable the business to help some of the team leaders to change. Namely, it became clear from different conversations with individuals working for NR that they often did not feel psychologically safe, and that the degree of inclusion was insufficient. Also, as NR is a safety-critical organisation whose strategy is to be more diverse and to help people think about different types of diversity, they needed a starting point for becoming more psychologically safe and inclusive within parts of the business.

The Great Together programme was commissioned as a team/group-based programme to excite, energise, and explore attitudes and mindset, and embed new behaviours to deliver a safe service culture. This is where the Quality of Interaction (Qi) Index came in. This tool gave the company the ability to identify a team’s starting point (current state). The rich insights from the use of this tool enabled the participants to develop an awareness of how their own behaviours and the team dynamics have an impact on teams and to directly inform the creation of their tangible habits to both enable and embed change. In short, the Qi Index ignites the real conversation that needed to be had between people to shift their behaviours, which is notoriously challenging.



Why the organisation chose the Qi Index

One of our partners who already worked with the Qi Index and other tools from Human Insight proposed the Qi Index to NR because it fits very well with the three aspects they needed to work on: psychological safety, inclusion and diversity. She emphasised that the use of the Qi tool would ignite and accelerate NR's ultimate goal of being more customer orientated. The tool was able to position each team from the outset of their psychologically safe growth and play back their own perceptions of where the team currently is and where they desired to be. It enabled them to draw their own conclusions about what needed to change. The company used the Qi Index as the front end of their Great Together programme for multiple teams. However, in this business case, we are zooming in on one leadership team who have specifically encountered the tool to help drive their culture shift over a twelve-month period.

Some of the key Great Together programme objectives are:

- Understand the impact of how you communicate in the team;
- Recognise different communication styles and adapt your approach to build understanding and rapport;
- Understand behaviours that support leaders to be an inclusive leader;
- Identify approaches to handling conflict and difficult behaviour;
- Participate and practice holding difficult conversations in environments of trust and support.



Insights for future growth

The team was very much working individually, and they did not come together as a collective. They knew it and could feel it within the team. However, it was felt rather than visualised, and the Qi Index provided the data to start that conversation. As a consequence, the team agreed on what they needed to do differently, and fundamentally that was about starting to listen to each other and hear the concerns that were being talked about. There was a need to voice past legacies and to be actively listened to.

The tool shone a light on the gap between the current and desired team behaviours. Their debrief contributions demonstrated the fear in some people to speak out and that a key influence was in the reactions from their leader. The leader was resistant to fully empower the team to take responsibility for their actions and had a preference for micromanaging at the operational level in holding them to account. This built a perception that they could not be trusted and that there was not an open trusted environment of being able to make mistakes and learn from them as a team.

It became evident that the team did not recognise the power of harnessing helpful behaviours to perform to the best of their ability and increase capabilities. The debrief facilitation worked hard to steer the team away from process and technical fixes and openly discuss behaviours. There was a strong desire to develop a technical strategy but there needed to be a recognition that this would not tackle unhelpful behaviours within the leadership team and ultimately help them to deliver the necessary business change and become more customer oriented.

A key outcome from the Qi debrief session was that of reduced levels of emotional intelligence and the need to exercise vulnerability without fear of blame or retribution. This in itself was preventing innovative contributions from the team and minimising their ability to collectively solve problems. There were clear demonstrations of 'learned behaviour' resulting from the way the team were being led and managed.

Better decisions together: Average position

Generative factor: 3,5



Better decisions together: Group spread

Generative factor: 3,5, standard deviation: 3,3



Group average and spread at the start of the 12-month process

How Qi insights impacted results

Over the last year, the team leader and the team have been working towards having more open and honest conversations – practising positive affirmations of one another. They have been thinking about what needs to be done in order to create that. Although these conversations were challenging, this resulted in a positive shift in the level of psychological safety. Now they feel much more psychologically safe, also because the leader has actively worked to create and role model a more psychologically safe place. His increased self-awareness has led him to open up more to team members and promote learning from mistakes. He recognised what he needed to do differently in order to make the team a better performing one. He listens better, does not seem to control everything so much and is much more empowering of his team. Because he previously lacked key elements of trust in key people, he lost sight of the importance of creating a cohesive team. However, the results within the leadership team show he has been able to do that.

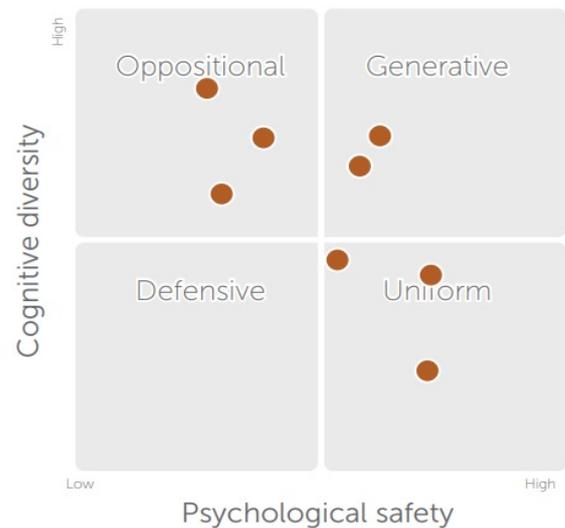
Better decisions together: Average position

Generative factor: 5,24



Better decisions together: Group spread

Generative factor: 5,24 , standard deviation: 2,62



Group average and spread at the end of the process: 12 months later

“Qi opened the team up to the possibility of wanting to do more, and they have embraced more things that will help them on their journey to being a different type of leadership team. The Qi tool was the starting point for this team, one that is seeking to be more effective.”

Diana Hogbin-Mills

Director at Midsummer Studio



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