

Trusting the TKI tool to manage conflict and talk about other issues

Is there room for provocation in development sessions? See why this consultant likes to create very intense situations in his trainings, and why he believes the TKI™ tool is one of the most versatile instruments to have in your portfolio.

Michael Brown works with organizations, teams and individuals who want to avoid derailing in their career or corporate trajectory, and who want to improve their performance in the workplace.

Calling his development interventions “wake up calls for people who have fallen asleep at the wheel”, they aim to bring about cultural and behavioural changes.

Brown’s use of the TKI™ Conflict Mode Instrument is particularly unusual. He uses the TKI tool both to address conflict as a business issue of its own, and as a framework to help clients talk about other issues.

He explains: “The TKI is a very good way of putting a metric on something very woolly in order to change a culture. I find it especially helpful when working with clients who are in denial about an issue – when you present them with the data, you can get into a proper discussion about what needs to be done about their issue.”

“There aren’t many situations where doing this TKI analysis isn’t useful – which is why I’ve used it so much as an independent; it’s so wonderfully generic and simple. People don’t get stuck on it or debate it or resent being put into a box. It works quickly and effectively.”

Business Challenges

- Negotiation and sales training
- Conflict management
- Team development

Company Profile

Michael is an independent Behavioural Change Consultant with 16 years of experience. He works with many different organizations offering tailored training events, coaching, and L&D consultancy, including Cisco, Jaguar, Deutsche Bank, and Cornwall Council.

Michael Brown

Solution

Brown believes people work faster and better if they are stimulated by training – not just intellectually, but emotionally too. His development sessions are distinctive because they actively bring conflict into the training room. “By opening up people’s default responses,” he explains, “you can create the basis for an extremely frank conversation and sort out what is really causing the problems they came to you with.”

In one of his training sessions, he worked with a team of customer service staff from Cisco. Brown challenged the team to agree to getting into a flight simulator that would mimic a helicopter crashing into water, and the ensuing scramble to escape. After some debate, the team agreed to the challenge, apart from one ‘hold-out’ who insisted he didn’t want to be involved.

As the entire team had to agree to the challenge before anyone could take part, the others encouraged and cajoled the final team member (via personal and revealing conversations about his background and how this was relevant to his fears) until he agreed.

Once everyone was ready to begin the challenge, Brown announced it was all a ruse, and that the flight simulator did not exist. The participants turned their anger and frustration on him, saying they felt let down and deceived. However, when asked the question ‘What have you learned about yourselves and your group?’, they began to understand. The group then had a three-hour discussion, facilitated using the TKI tool.

Tracy Brown, Cisco’s Leadership Foundation Program Manager at the time said, “It’s rare to be able to bring so much real conflict into the training room, and it certainly felt at the time that Michael was taking a degree of risk. However, when we debriefed the exercise using the TKI, it provided a really good foundation for the discussion, and quickly helped the participants to link their responses during the activity to their TKI profile.”

Solution

- Creating real situations in training sessions
- Use TKI for more than just conflict

“TKI is fantastic for helping people to understand where the issues are in relationships. It’s wonderfully practical to use – you don’t have to be certified to use it – and people ‘get it’ very, very quickly”

Michael Brown,
L&D Consultant,
Michael Brown

Michael Brown

“Bringing a real-life scenario into the room in this way, albeit virtually, was in my view an excellent decision, but is certainly not to be recommended unless you have thought through how to handle the fallout from it, and are prepared to go through an uncomfortable phase before participants get the point.”

In another example, he worked with Haringey Council who wanted to discuss how they dealt with conflict and solved problems. He brought two pheasants into the training room and told the team he wanted them “oven ready in 20 minutes”. A lengthy debate took place on whether the team should accept the challenge at all. Meanwhile, one team member had left the room and returned later with two oven-ready pheasants.

What followed was a discussion about values and ethics – the ‘maverick’ butcher who skinned the pheasants may have his license taken away, and he had acted impulsively to make his team look good but had not considered what effect this would have on others outside the team. Brown describes this as “the most powerful bit of the few days – and it wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t had a real situation come into the room. People are human beings, not just employees – and helping to expose people’s deep-down feelings raises the stakes, and hugely magnifies the potential benefits.”

Results

While Brown’s style is controversial and undoubtedly provocative, his innovative and lively training sessions using the TKI are well-received.

His work provides a good financial return on investment for clients. An assessment of one training initiative that he ran identified over £1m in tangible additional revenue from just 20 learners.

Another initiative encouraged a sales team to move from Accommodating and Avoiding to Competing and Collaborating by asking more questions and getting to the real roots of customer needs. This resulted in bigger pieces of work coming through, which in turn translated into a 40% profit increase within 18 months of the TKI awareness-raising training.

Results

- More honest and open discussions between teams
- Straightforward and accessible model for dealing with conflict
- Excellent return on investment with financials to back it up



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