

Working in partnership with David Gurteen, the LLA was delighted to host a London Knowledge Café on the subject of attentiveness on 29 May 2018.

David has actively promoted this fabulous means of generating deep and rich conversation around a range of topics for many years – and practically supports their delivery across the globe. The basic idea behind a public Knowledge Café is to create an environment where people can come together to have interesting conversations on a topic of mutual interest – typically on a theme to do with Knowledge Management, Education, Creativity, Innovation or Social Learning.

Over 80 people from a wide range of occupational groups and economic sectors registered to attend the event in May, with a third of those coming from the NHS in London – and nearly 50 disregarded the stormy weather to join us that evening in order to explore in discussion the apparent paradox of being a middle manager at a time when a focus on business delivery is paramount but when there is also a strong imperative to attend to the health and wellbeing of the team.

Recognising this seeming antagonism requires leaders to consider how best to navigate this. In this regard, the notion of “*attentiveness*” seems especially important. It seems that this can be expressed in three ways:

First, leaders need to be present and heedful in the conversations that take place in the workplace;

Second, they need to be aware of the humanness of those around them, in terms of them as people and of the needs that they bring with them to work every day; and

Lastly, they need to be alert to the fresh thinking and new ideas that will always appear in any human context such as an organisation.

Assuming this as a starting point – which in itself was open to contestation in the discussions – we went on to consider the following question:

How might leaders be meaningfully attentive in order to bridge the requirements both to deliver and to care in the contemporary workplace?

The knowledge café approach privileges the conversation in and of itself rather than its capture in some form or another. At this event, we enjoyed three rounds of table discussion and a final plenary, which we undertook sitting in a large circle.

I blogged some of my personal reflections on the conversations in which I was involved; this can be found via the following link <https://cofefellows.wordpress.com/2018/06/06/on-attentiveness/>

If you would like further information about either the discussions that we enjoyed around the notion of attentiveness or, indeed, about the knowledge café technique as means of opening up conversation in an organisational context, please do not hesitate to contact me at mark.cole@hee.nhs.uk