CONFRONTING DIFFICULT ISSUES

"Confrontation takes considerable courage, and many people would prefer to take the course of least resistance . . . . In the long run, people will trust and respect you more if you are honest and open and kind with them. You care enough to confront."
Covey (1992)

As Covey points out, confronting the difficult issues is not easy – yet it may be necessary. Examples of when you may need to tackle an underlying issue could include the following:

- someone consistently letting the team down – by arriving late or failing to complete their work without an appropriate reason

- someone behaving inappropriately towards other people in the team – for example, being rude or inconsiderate

- problems about how someone behaves towards internal or external customers or clients

- someone failing to work to the standards of their professional practice

- value problems such as prejudice or bias.

Confronting issues like these does not mean getting cross with the person or people involved. It requires talking the issues through with them and giving them feedback about their behaviour. It helps if you follow the steps for constructive feedback:

- Focus on the behaviour rather than the person. Avoid personalising the issues (for example, by saying 'you're a difficult person') and instead highlight what they did (for example, 'I found what you said hurtful').

- Describe the behaviour rather than judging it. Try to avoid saying things like, 'that was a terrible thing to do'.

- Give specific examples; for example, 'you were late for the last two team meetings' rather than 'you are always late'.

Covey, S. (1992). *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Free Press

- Seek the other person's explanation. They have the right to put their point of view, and it is vital to find out whether you both see the problem the same way.

- Look beneath the surface. It is quite possible that there are other reasons for the problem – for example, in the person's private life.

- Look for alternative ways forward. You need to move from the problem and to find solutions. If you consider alternatives, this gives the other person choice.

Covey, S. (1992). *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Free Press