

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Silent Drain on Innovation, Confidence and Talent

Why your best people are going quiet - and what is really causing it

Your organisation is probably losing ideas, talent and performance to a pattern that never appears in an HR report.

The Problem Nobody Reports

Every week, in teams across your organisation, someone's idea is dismissed before it is fully heard. Someone stays quiet in a meeting rather than risks the reaction. Someone works late fixing a problem they didn't cause. Someone decides, quietly, that they've had enough.

None of these moments generate a complaint. None reach HR. Taken individually, none seems significant enough to act on.

But taken together, they are costing you more than you realise.

3 in 10

"Only 3 in 10 employees strongly agree their opinions count at work" (Gallup, 2019)

10×

"Toxic culture is 10× more likely to drive employee attrition than compensation" (MIT Sloan Management Review, 2022)

75%

"75% of employees who experience problematic workplace behaviour never report it to a manager or HR" (EEOC)

What Is Actually Happening

Research on workplace dynamics consistently shows that a small proportion of people - perhaps one or two in a typical team - slightly overestimate their own knowledge or judgment. This is not arrogance in the obvious sense. It is a subtle miscalibration, and most people who have it are entirely unaware of it.

But the effects ripple outwards.

People with this pattern tend to:

- Interrupt or talk over others more than they realise, because they believe they already understand
- Dismiss ideas too quickly, without fully hearing them
- React to feedback or challenge with defensiveness that gradually trains those around them not to bother
- Shift tactics when one approach doesn't work - from dismissal to humour, from humour to pressure, from pressure to authority

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- Direct this behaviour selectively, appearing entirely reasonable to senior leaders while colleagues experience something different

This selectivity is important. It means the problem rarely looks like a problem to the people with the power to address it. The manager behaves one way with the CEO and another way with the team. Even if someone raises concerns, management say “We’ve never seen that” - because they genuinely haven’t.

The behaviour is not malicious. It is a pattern driven by a subtle but persistent overestimation of one’s own understanding - and it is almost never visible to the person displaying it.

The Business Impact

When this pattern is present but unaddressed, organisations reliably see the same effects:

What you see	What is driving it
Innovation initiatives that don’t deliver	Ideas are filtered before they reach discussion. The safest idea wins, not the best one.
Engagement scores that plateau	People are present but guarded. Discretionary effort and psychological safety decline together.
Talented people leaving for “fit” reasons	The environment around one or two people becomes untenable. No single incident explains it.
Recurring conflict without resolution	Standard interventions address the symptom. The pattern adapts and continues.
Neurodivergent talent underperforming	This group is disproportionately affected by dismissive environments but would disproportionately drive innovation when supported.

Why Usual Approaches Don’t Fix It

Coaching the person with the pattern rarely works. The same quality that creates the problem - a resistance to outside input - also makes them resistant to coaching. They may tone down their behaviour temporarily when they sense scrutiny. They may become more polite while still finding ways to dismiss, redirect, or ignore.

The more effective intervention is to train the people around them. When an entire team understands the pattern and responds to it consistently, the behavioural options narrow over time. The pattern requires an accommodating environment to sustain itself. Change the environment, and the pattern gradually loses traction.

This is not about confrontation or conflict escalation. It is about consistent, proportional, well-timed responses that close the routes the pattern depends on.

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The Red-Liner Model

The Red-Liner Model was developed and refined over more than a decade of intensive workshop practice with some of the most analytically rigorous audiences available: researchers, PhD candidates, postdoctoral scientists and professors across leading European universities and research institutions. Working repeatedly with people trained to examine ideas critically and articulate their experience precisely gave the model an unusually robust foundation. The patterns it describes, however, are not specific to academic environments. Wherever you find expertise, hierarchy, and the need for people to collaborate and contribute ideas, the same dynamics appear - in pharma, in tech, in healthcare, in any organisation where what people think and say determines what gets built or discovered.

The model provides:

- A clear explanation of why certain people behave as they do - and why they are unlikely to change through normal social feedback
- A practical method for teams to respond consistently to boundary-testing behaviour
- A framework for rebuilding appropriate confidence in those whose confidence has been eroded
- Tools that can be applied in real interactions, not just in theory

Workshop participants consistently describe the Red-Liner Model as “eye-opening” and “lifechanging”. For many, it is the first time they have had a structural explanation for something they have experienced for years but could not articulate.

What Organisations Gain

Organisations that introduce the Red-Liner Model report:

- Ideas reaching discussion that would previously have been filtered out
- Measurable improvement in psychological safety within teams
- Reduced time spent by leadership mediating the same conflicts
- Better retention of high performers who previously left citing culture
- Significantly increased confidence and assertiveness in team members who had previously gone quiet
- Innovation outputs that better reflect the actual talent in the room

These are not soft outcomes. They have direct implications for unleashing of potential, delivery / productivity, retention, psychological safety and competitive performance.

The Next Step

The full white paper explains the behavioural mechanism in detail, including the two distinct patterns within the model and why they require different responses.

If your organisation is experiencing flat engagement, innovation that isn't converting, talent loss you can't fully explain, or teams that seem capable of more than they produce - the Red-Liner Model may explain why.

We offer a structured Diagnostic Session for leadership teams: a half-day engagement designed to identify whether these patterns are present in your organisation and what a targeted response would look like.

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