

Making the Invisible Visible

Why Communication Training Fails - and Why Power Dynamics Matter More

Summary of a white Paper for Knowledge-Heavy, Ambiguity-Rich Organisations

Summary

Understanding and Managing Power Dynamics Under Pressure

Many organisations invest heavily in communication skills, feedback training, and leadership development - yet still struggle with recurring interpersonal problems:

- Conversations that derail under pressure
- Certain individuals who dominate, dismiss, or undermine others
- Issues that repeatedly escalate to HR despite previous interventions
- Talented employees disengaging, losing confidence, or leaving

These problems are often treated as isolated incidents or skill gaps. In practice, they are usually symptoms of something more fundamental: **unrecognised and unmanaged power dynamics in everyday interactions.**

The Core Insight

When power dynamics are poorly understood, organisations rely on tools that work only when everyone is cooperative.

When pressure rises, those tools often fail.

The **Red-Liner Model (RLM)** is a conceptual framework that explains what is actually happening in these moments - and why many well-intentioned interventions do not change behaviour over time.

RLM helps people recognise patterns of dominance-seeking behaviour that:

- Shift tactics when challenged
- Remain plausible, deniable, and socially acceptable
- Escalate when boundaries are unclear or inconsistently enforced

Once these patterns are visible, responses can be calibrated to change the dynamic - not merely manage the fallout.

What Is “Red-Liner Behaviour”?

Within the Red-Liner Model, *red-liner behaviour* is not a label for a person or a personality type.

It describes a **pattern of behaviour** in which someone:

- Consistently seeks advantage in interactions
- Tests boundaries and adapts tactics when challenged
- Uses interruption, dismissal, emotional pressure, or role authority to maintain control

The model focuses on **patterns, not blame**, and on responses that work regardless of intent.

Why Traditional Approaches Fall Short

Most workplace interventions fail because they:

- Address individual incidents rather than recurring patterns
- Rely on scripts or techniques that collapse under pressure
- Encourage avoidance in order to “keep the peace”
- Mistake short-term calm for long-term resolution

In many cases, the first attempt to set clearer boundaries makes things feel worse, not better.

This leads people to conclude that the approach was wrong - and to abandon it prematurely.

RLM explains why this happens and what to expect instead.

From Understanding to Response

RLM is not a communication style or a set of scripts.

It is a **diagnostic way of thinking** that enables effective action in real time.

Building on this understanding, participants learn a **Boundary-Led Response Method** - an approach to responding to power-seeking behaviour that is:

- Grounded in pattern recognition, not personality judgement
- Designed for live, high-pressure interactions
- Focused on clarity and consistency rather than escalation
- Explicit about what happens when boundaries are first enforced

Crucially, the method recognises that:

- Power-seeking behaviour often intensifies temporarily when boundaries are made clear
- Clear, appropriate responses to these micro-escalations are what produce long-term de-escalation at the organisational level

Over time, as power tactics stop working, the behaviour diminishes.

Why This Matters for Organisations

When power dynamics remain unmanaged, the costs accumulate quietly:

- Repeated escalations to HR
- Loss of psychological safety
- Reduced participation and innovation
- Higher attrition among capable, conscientious staff
- Managers spending disproportionate time firefighting interpersonal issues

When people across the organisation share a common understanding of these power dynamics - and know how to respond consistently - many issues are resolved before they require formal intervention.

The result is not just fewer incidents, but a **more stable, self-regulating interaction culture**.

Where This Approach Is Most Valuable

This work resonates particularly strongly in environments that are:

- Knowledge-intensive
- Ambiguity-rich
- Politically complex
- Dependent on collaboration rather than hierarchy

It is especially relevant where subtle dominance behaviours, bias, or repeated low-level friction undermine performance without ever quite crossing formal thresholds.

In Summary

- **Understanding power dynamics predicts behaviour**
- **Responding appropriately in real time changes outcomes**
- **Changing the pattern reduces long-term organisational cost**

The Red-Liner Model offers organisations a rigorous way to see what is happening beneath the surface of difficult interactions - and a practical, defensible way to respond when it matters most.