**Experiment B: Defining a complex problem in your school**

As leaders, we regularly encounter complex problems. However, complex problems are very difficult to understand. Part of the reason that complex problems are difficult to because different people will describe the same problem in different ways.

There is no one ‘right’ way of understanding the problem. Each description of the problem will likely include important observations or insights.

Therefore, to understand a complex problem in full, we work with a shared description/understanding of the problem. This process is called ‘collective sense-making’.

However, making sense of complex problems is hard and requires practice. In this experiment, we are going to ask you to understand a complex problem in your school by making use of the individuals around you.

**Preparation for your IDS Meeting: Please complete before your IDS session.**

1: Describe the problem in your own words (no more than 100 words).

2: The first step is that you will need to identify a complex problem. Use the table below to assist you in checking whether this problem is a complex problem.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Describe the problem: | |
|  |  |
|  | Tick |
| Are there some parts of the problem which make it different/unique to other similar problems?​  ​ |  |
| Could other people describe this problem differently? ​  ​ |  |
| Is this problem linked to another problem? ​  ​ |  |
| Is it difficult to know what is the ‘right’ thing to do? ​  ​ |  |
| Is it difficult to predict what will happen if you try to solve the problem?​  ​ |  |
| Could trying to solve the problem lead to consequences which you then have to fix/ resolve? ​  ​ |  |
| Are there some parts of the problem which make it different/unique to other similar problems?​  ​ |  |

If you have not met the criteria for a complex problem, go back to 1 and repeat the exercise until all the ‘ticks’ are present.

3: Describe what the problem is and why you think it might be happening. Answer each question below

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What information do you have about the problem? |  |
| What information is most use to you and why? |  |
| What am I assuming about the problem and why? |  |
| What conclusion can I draw about the problem? |  |
| What do I believe is happening in the situation? |  |
| What steps should I take next? |  |

In your Individual Development Session, you will have been introduced to the Ladder of Inference to develop how you work through complex problems. You will work through the ladder of inference with your coach during this session.

The coach will provide you with this resource to use this Ladder of Inference with your colleague.

**Experiment**

1. Find two more people who are involved in the complex problem. Ask them to describe what the problem and what might be causing it to happen. It is very important that they write their description down using the Ladder of Inference. Provided in Resource #.
2. Arrange to meet the two other people involved. In this meeting, you should

A: Share your answers with each other. Let the other individuals speak first to share their answers. Ask a group, answer the following questions.

i: What is similar in your understanding of the problem?

ii: What is different in your understanding of the problem?

iii: What have you heard that has improved your understanding of the problem?

B: Take out a new blank copy of the ladder of inference. Work together to come to a shared, agreed description of the incident and what is likely to be causing it to happen.

1. Prepare the following reflection for your next coaching session

A: How did working with others help to increase your understanding of the incident?

B: Why was it important to have a shared format for writing the answers?