

Breaking the BHD Cycle

Civil Service Capability Through Practical, Scalable Tools

A practical case for prevention, practice and scale

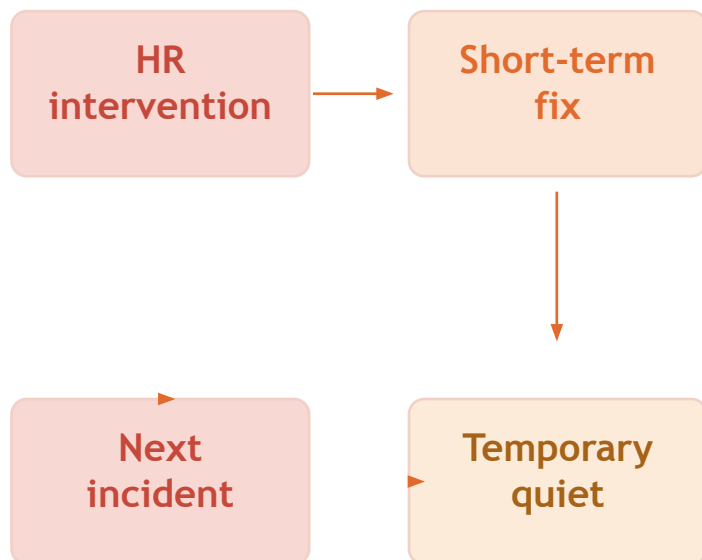
Prevention over reaction

Capability over dependency

Everyday practice over one-off fixes



The problem: the eternal BHD cycle



The loop persists because capability is built too late, then lost too quickly.

What keeps the cycle going

- Issues surface late: via HR, survey spikes, or formal escalation.
- The default response is a short-term fix rather than capability building.
- Momentum fades once immediate pressure passes.
- The same behaviour returns because daily practice has not changed.

The cycle rewards reaction and delays prevention.

The cost of BHD

Nationwide impact and direct Civil Service pressure

Why prevention matters

£18bn

annual cost to UK employers

lost productivity, turnover, conflict

9m+

UK workers affected

bullying is not marginal

47.1%

of long-term sickness absence

largest Civil Service cause: mental ill-health

£2.7m

illustrative spend to retrain 10,000 managers

at £270 per manager

The pattern is expensive because the spend repeats while the underlying behaviour stays largely unchanged.

Short-term intervention costs are visible.
The hidden costs of conflict, absence, disengagement and turnover are much larger.

We are paying repeatedly for problems we are not preventing.

Apolitical contributions

Three practical tools, one common purpose

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Respectful Workplace Toolkit

Early-stage, constructive workplace conversations

Prevention

2

Conversations That Count

AI-enabled LGBTQ+ inclusion coaching and scenario practice

Inclusion

3

Smart-Talk: AI-Powered Training for Tough Conversations

On-demand rehearsal for tough management conversations

Confidence in action

The key insight from toolkit users: interest existed, but established habits pulled people back to old patterns.

Solution 1: The Respectful Workplace Toolkit

Prevention tool

What the toolkit is built to do

- 1 Start earlier**
Moves the conversation upstream, before conflict hardens or becomes formal.
- 2 Give structure**
Helps managers frame difficult discussions clearly and calmly.
- 3 Prevent escalation**
Reduces automatic dependence on HR as the first response.

What the download pattern revealed

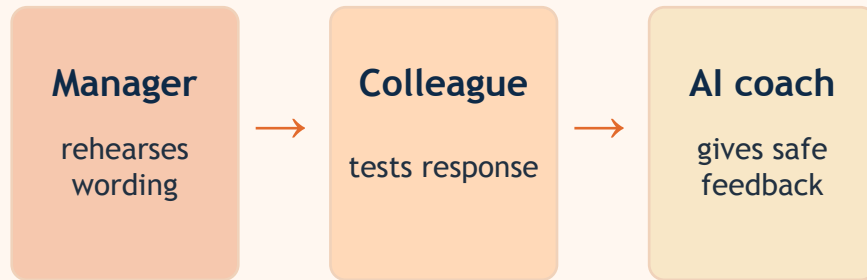
Tools on their own do not change a system that defaults to avoidance, procedure and inertia.

- Capability gap: managers still need practice, not just guidance.
- Cultural gap: local norms often pull people back toward old habits.
- Embedding gap: adoption needs repetition, visibility and everyday use.

Solution 2: Conversations That Count

Inclusion coach

A safer place to practise sensitive conversations



Safe practice before the real conversation

Why this matters

- Managers often avoid sensitive inclusion conversations because they fear saying the wrong thing.
- Scenario practice creates a safe rehearsal space before those conversations happen for real.
- That builds confidence, reduces silence and supports more inclusive everyday behaviour.

Relevant because LGBTQA staff continue to report higher rates of bullying and discrimination in Civil Service data.

Solution 3: Smart-Talk

On-demand practice

Practice the conversations managers avoid

Performance feedback

Behaviour reset

Early conflict check-in

AI coach on demand

Why Smart-Talk is timely

- Repeated practice builds confidence that one-off training rarely sustains.
- It targets the hardest point of failure: the moment a manager has to speak early and clearly.
- It scales without waiting for a workshop, contract or crisis trigger.

53%

negative micromanagement was the most common bullying or harassment type in the 2025 People Survey.

36%

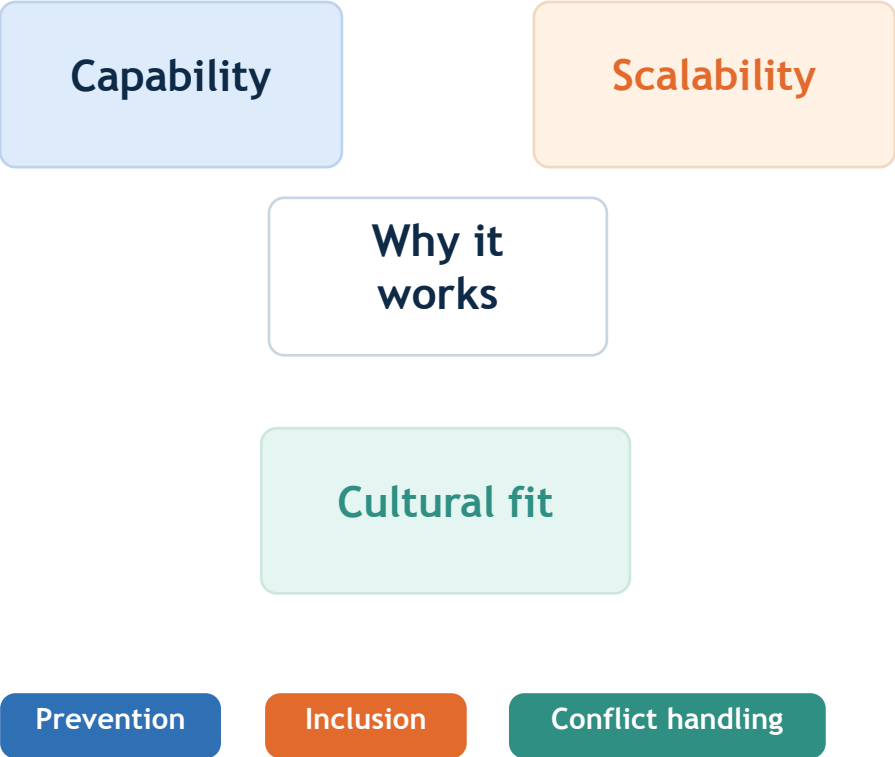
Intimidation, or verbal or written aggression

37%

Humiliated in front of team or others

Integrated analysis: why the solutions work

Operational model



Taken together, the tools address the real operating conditions that keep BHD alive:

- Lack of time** On-demand use means practice can happen in the flow of work.
- Avoidance** Scenario rehearsal lowers the threshold for speaking early and clearly.
- Fear** Safe practice reduces anxiety about saying the wrong thing.
- Procedural inertia** Capability is built internally rather than outsourced case by case.

This is not three separate products. It is one practical culture-change model.

What this means for the Civil Service

A more sustainable path

The Civil Service does not need more reactive spend every time a problem becomes visible. It needs repeatable, everyday behavioural capability owned inside the system.

Prevention

Capability

Confidence

Respectful
workplace

From crisis spend to capability

What changes if this model is adopted

- Less dependence on one-off external fixes
- Earlier intervention before issues escalate
- More confidence in sensitive and difficult conversations
- A respectful workplace built through practice

We can stop paying for the same problems over and over.

Empower managers early. Build respectful behaviour every day. Thank you.

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