

Transcript of Robyn Vasey on Teams

So when we think about the impact of the anxiety we're feeling on our work teams and on our work systems there are 3 things that I can say draw our attention to. First of all, when we are facing a situation of uncertainty and of threat work groups can pull together. We've seen this in the solidarity that has been shown in health and social care services where individuals making personal sacrifices perhaps not seeing their children, putting themselves at a heightened risk of infection and taking on new roles. I heard a story about a senior surgeon who had been redeployed on to a medical ward to help with caring for people with Coronavirus who changed his name badge so that his grade read that he was a training junior doctor.

This is an example of this increase in collaboration and willingness to put aside differences or even conflicts in order to work together. We know that a whole group and even a whole organisation can respond to anxiety by going in to what Wilfred Bion called a fight / flight state of mind. You may have heard of the fight/flight responses of an individual; this is in the body where the heart races, body temperature rises, the body's preparing for action in response to a threat but this can also be thought about in terms of a whole group state of mind. The group's fight / flight response prepares the group for action and also unifies the group to stand together against a shared enemy, as it were.

So, in fact, solidarity can be one aspect of this state of mind but we know that a group in fight / flight can also have its challenges. One of the challenges can be that there is an overemphasis on activity. Now this may be necessary but it can also get to the point where it becomes out of touch with reality either because it's simply not possible to sustain these high levels of activity without rest or because the activity is being done for its own sake without really being what is needed. For example, we've seen some parts of the health service rush too quickly into action and then, when circumstances change, they need to change their plans, which can cause confusion.

We've seen some businesses with anxieties about their economic future make offers of advice or of work but they're not really what people are looking for. All understandable reactions to anxiety and again they may be necessary aspects but it's also important to recognise when this response is happening. This fight / flight response interactivity in a way that's not really about what is most needed at this point in time.