



# IT'S ONLY BANTER...

Navigating the rules  
of workplace humour



LAUGH**OL**OGY

[www.laughology.co.uk](http://www.laughology.co.uk)



@Laughology

maybo

positive and safer outcomes



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## **TODAY'S SESSION WILL COVER:**

- How humour and language can be used for engagement in an inclusive and positive way.
- The power of laughter to build connection, trust, and psychological safety.
- Exploring the difference between intent & impact and the importance of empathy.
- Discover ways to confidently challenge when needed and open up conversations.

# LAUGHTER

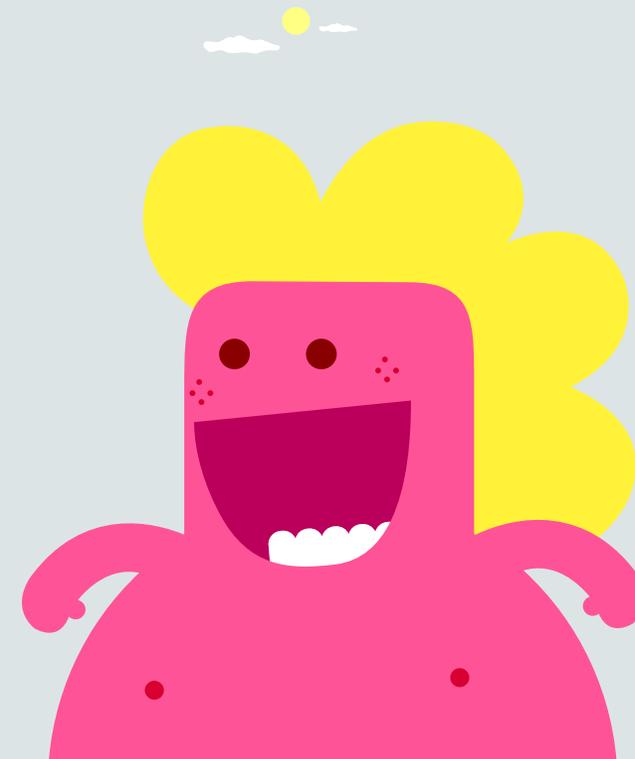
A communication tool to express how we feel and strengthen social interactions.

**Why it matters:** Humans needed strong groups to survive. Laughter created connection, trust, and emotional synchrony quickly.

# HUMOUR

Humour is a brain tool for exploring complexity, shifting perspective, and building human connection.

**Why it matters:** It reduces fear, boosts creativity, and helps people adapt and thrive in an uncertain world.



**Humour triggers  
& learned optimism**

**What makes you laugh?**

# WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

**27%**

**More motivating**

**15%**

**More engaged**

**18%**

**Increase in sales**

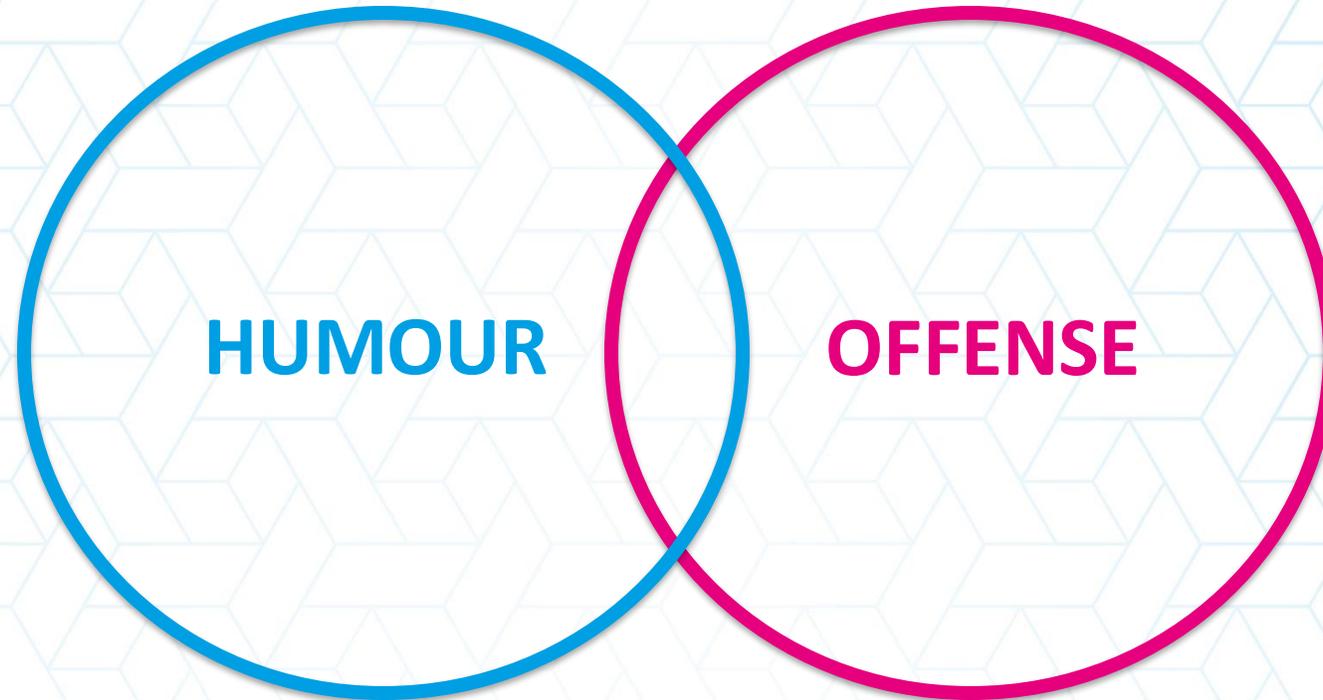


# WHAT IS BANTER?

**A conversation that is funny and not serious,  
joking with another that is friendly.**

**It does not include someone being singled out and laughed  
at (at their expense).**

# HOW DO WE KNOW?



# WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED?



**Life  
experiences**

**Interpersonal risk**

**Past and current  
experiences  
with individual**

**Belief  
systems**

**Cultural  
barriers**





THERE'S NOTHING  
MICRO ABOUT  
**MICROAGGRESSIONS**





I've got a friend who I say that too and they never complain

I call everyone...

I thought everyone like you was called...

It's your problem not mine

You're just being over sensitive

It was only meant as a joke

Well, everyone else found it funny.



**IT'S ONLY  
BANTER**





### **Power/ Relationship Dynamics**

Hierarchy and authority; humour from leaders can carry extra weight or unintended implications.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

Recognise cultural differences in humour to avoid misunderstandings or offense.

### **Social Climate**

Consider current events and social issues

### **History and Shared Experiences**

Avoid jokes about past failures, sensitive historical incidents.

### **Context and setting**

The environment you're in matters

### **Relationship Depth**

How well you know others

### **Insider/Outsider Dynamics**

Inclusive humour strengthens bonds, while inside jokes can alienate those not "in the know."

### **Intent vs. Impact**

Acknowledging impact over intent is a way of respecting others' perspectives and experiences. It builds trust and safety

### **Purpose and Relevance**

Humour should have a positive purpose, such as building connection or easing tension, without belittling or criticising.



## The Challenge Framework: Direct, Disarm, Decide

A structured approach to discussing complex or sensitive topics with clarity, care, and confidence.

**Direct** How to challenge constructively and engage thoughtfully.

**Disarm** How to reduce defensiveness and create a safe conversation space.

**Decide** How to determine the next steps based on the discussion's outcome.

# THE POWER OF PAUSE



## STIMULUS

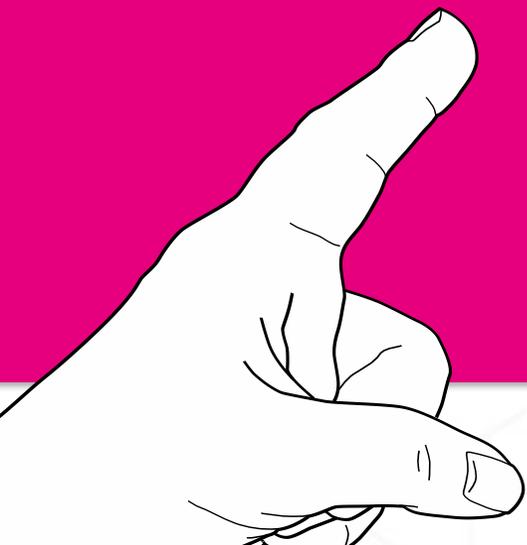
See it from a neutral perspective

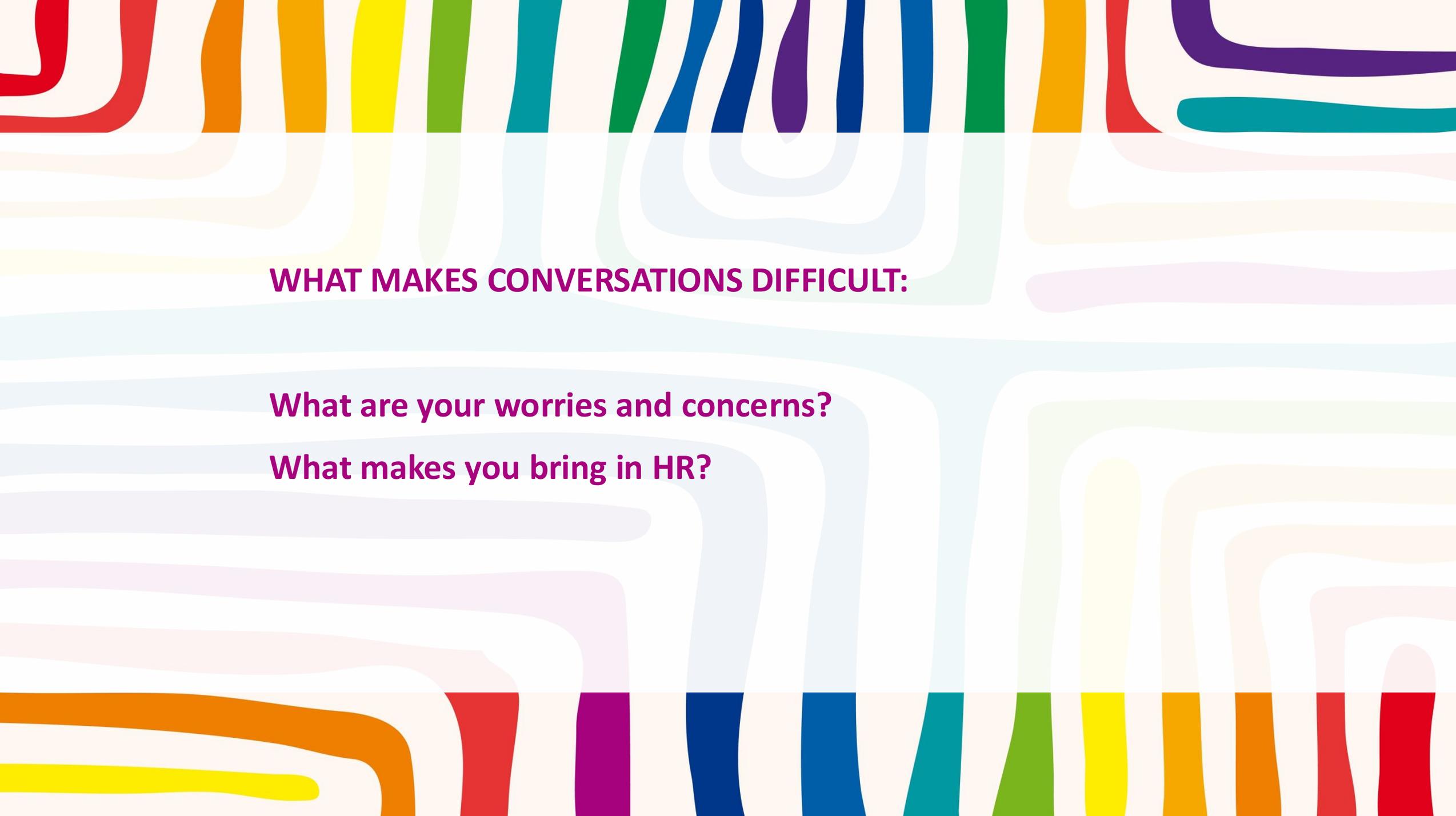
## PAUSE

Time to think,  
don't jump in with  
emotion or reaction  
(Think, Feel, Do)

## RESPONSE

Choose to respond in  
a way that's open  
and curious



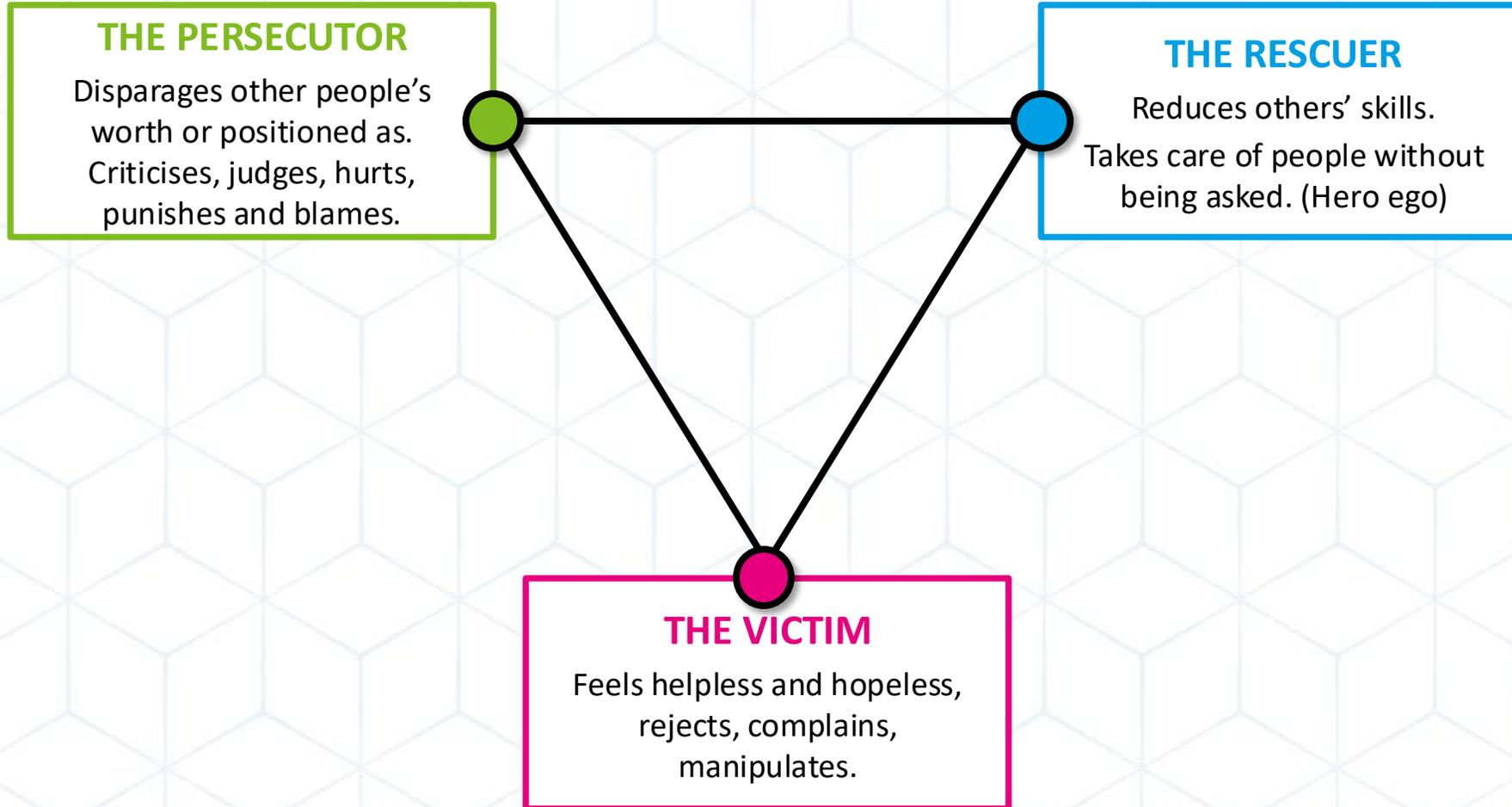


**WHAT MAKES CONVERSATIONS DIFFICULT:**

**What are your worries and concerns?**

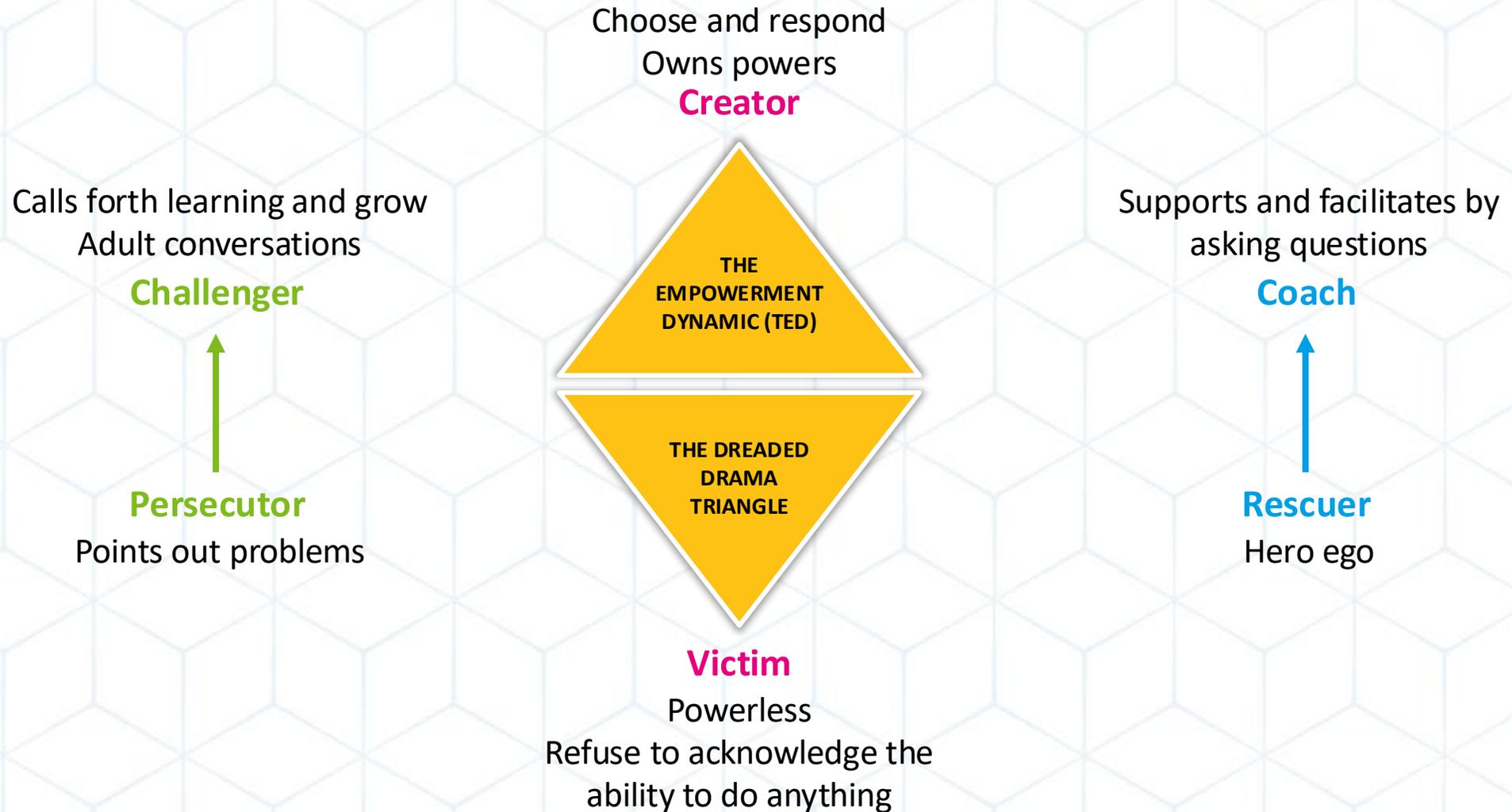
**What makes you bring in HR?**

# THE DRAMA TRIANGLE



# BALANCING AND BREAKING FREE

TIPS & TRICKS FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS





## Things to Try:

**Check Your Intentions** – Are you aiming for understanding rather than confrontation?

**Use ‘I’ Statements** – This prevents defensiveness:

- *“I felt uncomfortable when I heard that.”*

**Ask for Clarification** – Encourages reflection:

- *“What did you mean by that?”*

**Frame It as a Learning Moment** – Instead of accusing, position it as an opportunity for growth:

- *“I’d love to talk about this because it made me pause.”*

**Pick the Right Setting** – If possible, have the conversation privately to create a safe space.

## Disarm - Creating Space for an Open Conversation

### Things to Try:

- **Acknowledge the Discomfort** - Name it so people feel less threatened: *“I know this can be uncomfortable, but I think it’s important we talk about it.”*
- **Reassure That It’s About Learning, Not Blame** - *“I know you meant no harm, and I also know impact matters. Can we talk about that?”*
- **Encourage Perspective-Taking** - Invite the other person to consider different experiences.
- **Pause Before Responding** - If the conversation is getting tense, take a moment to breathe and reset.

## Decide

### Choosing the Best Next Step

After addressing the situation, determine the most constructive way forward. Some conversations lead to **immediate learning**, while others may require **ongoing work** or **formal action**.



# USING HUMOUR



## Ways to use humour safely:

- keep it inclusive – Avoid jokes about personal traits like race, gender, or appearance.
- Use self-directed humour – Light self-deprecating jokes can be effective but should remain positive.
- Focus on shared experiences – Workplace quirks or universally relatable moments work best.
- Consider context and audience – Ensure humour is appropriate, professional, and well-received.



# ALLYSHIP: BEHAVIOURS TO CHALLENGE

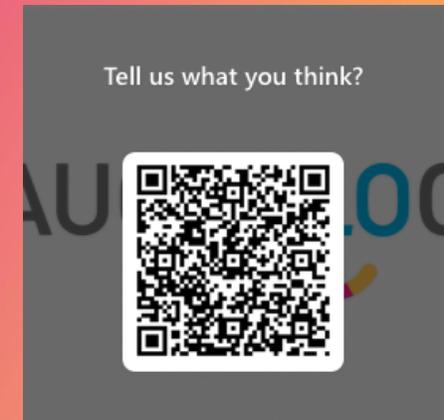
1. Language
2. Grouping
3. Gossip
4. Only joking
5. Microaggressions
6. Misconceptions

**IF IN DOUBT DON'T SAY IT**

**IF YOU NEED TO SAY 'IT'S ONLY BANTER' – IT'S USUALLY OFFENSIVE**

# MAKING WORK YOUR HAPPY PLACE

Find out more about how  
Laughology can help make you  
and your people happy and  
productive.



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