

Conflict management and power



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What do we think of conflicts? How do we manage them in our organization? How do we relate to power?

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Description:

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One of the things I notice when I give a course on conflicts is that when we hear the word conflict, people often would prefer it if they didn't exist. This is because, based on the experiences we've lived, very often images come to mind of violence, fear (that we may be hurt, that relationships may deteriorate, that the organization will experience a turmoil...) and, finally, a feeling that this shouldn't be happening and that when it does happen, we must have done something wrong.

Yet even when we wish for them to disappear with all our might, they don't. The best we can do to minimize the danger and the risk of hurting one another is to consider becoming friends with conflict. Or even better, if we can turn to conflict and see them as an opportunity, they become the quickest way to learn from each other and make the organization grow.

How do we do this? By fostering the necessary skills to manage conflict, which also means managing emotions and power.

Turning to emotional management, organizations usually don't prioritize this; however, in recent times this has started to change: more and more, organizations are establishing care committees, hold emotional assemblies or make space and time in meetings to ask ourselves how we feel.

As for power, often when we enter a conflict with someone we lose touch with our own power and project it towards the other person. Sometimes, if we are not aware of the power we have, we lose sight of the other person and hurt them without even knowing we are doing this. In any case, the other person becomes further alienated, creating two separate entities far from each other, finding it increasingly difficult to listen to each other and understand that I am also a part of this other entity.

So, what do we do with power? Everyone holds power within; it is the ability to have an impact on our surroundings. Power has a personal dimension (we may develop it during our life, and it is never-ending); and then it also has a social and political dimension, meaning it is given to us (for instance, by our social class, our origin, our gender, our sexual orientation, etc.) and it has to do with the things we value the most as a society. So, power is related to privilege. An important element in all this is that we are often unaware of the privileges we have and the power they confer on us. That is when we may misuse power. That is why, when we are talking of managing conflicts, it is also important to bear this other element in mind.

Having said that, we bring you a series of questions and reflexions on these aspects: what do we think of conflicts? How do we manage them in our organizations? What about emotions, is there any room for them? Where do I position myself in my organization? How do we relate to power?

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