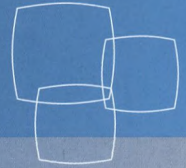




Workplace Conflict: Traps to Avoid



Trap 1

Failing to Separate Operational and Relational Problems

Description

Disputes resulting from confusing operational conflicts with interpersonal conflicts, or vice versa.

Possible Strategies

- Address all aspects of the problem.
- Be aware that relational problems may contribute to the escalation of operational problems, or vice versa.

Trap 2

I Must Be Right

Description

Utilizing approaches that encourage the other party to agree that you are right and admit that he or she is wrong.

Possible Strategies

- Let go of “I’m right and you’re wrong!” thinking and recognize that each person’s perspective is valid, even if you don’t agree with it.
- Stay curious rather than jumping to conclusions, particularly about the other party’s motivation.
- Be willing to listen, to be influenced by what you hear, and to look for mutually acceptable solutions that address all the issues identified.

Trap 3

Targeting One Person or Group as “the Problem”

Description

Losing sight of the problem and assigning blame to individuals (scapegoating) and seeing everything related to the problem in terms of them.

Possible Strategies

- Recognize everyone’s contribution to the problem and that everyone can be part of the solution.
- Separate the person from the problem.
- Explore the positions, issues, priorities and interests of each individual.

Trap 4

Confusing Intent and Impact

Description

Assuming that others’ intentions are whatever we assume them to be, especially when we have been hurt.

Possible Strategies

- Recognize that we judge ourselves by our intentions and that we judge others by the impact their behaviours have on us.
- Accept that we can never truly know another person’s intentions.
- Avoid elevating assumptions to the level of facts.



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Trap 5

Jumping to Conclusions

Description

Interpreting what we observe through our own beliefs and then looking for data that reinforces our initial interpretations, assumptions and conclusions, to the exclusion of other data that may be relevant.

Possible Strategies

- Accept that we observe only a portion of the data available in any situation.
- Recognize that in any situation there will be multiple sets of “facts,” perceptions, assumptions and conclusions.

Trap 6

One Strategy Fits All

Description

Regardless of the situation, we employ our preferred conflict-management style (i.e., avoid, accommodate, collaborate, compromise or compete).

Possible Strategies

- Expand your repertoire to include a variety of styles so that you have a choice of options to fit different situations.
- Recognize that each style can be appropriate, depending on the situation.

Trap 7

Getting Trapped in the Drama Triangle

Description

Seeing yourself as the victim or the hero and the other party as the villain.

Possible Strategies

- Take responsibility for your own thoughts, actions and emotions — there are no victims or villains.
- Empower yourself to confront the situation by engaging the other party to work through the issue.

Trap 8

Moving Towards Solutions Too Quickly

Description

Attempting to resolve the issues in a conflict without understanding their sources, thus losing sight of the bigger picture and focusing on one aspect of the situation at the cost of others.

Possible Strategies

- Ensure that all voices are heard and all solutions are acceptable to all participants.
- Be aware that when people feel that their priorities are ignored or minimized, they resist moving forward, either passively or aggressively.
- Recognize that having a difficult conversation is a challenge, but is essential to ensuring a complete understanding of the issue.



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