

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2026 Edition

Feature

Embrace Conflict

Unveil its gifts in the workplace

Conflict in the workplace often carries a negative connotation, evoking images of tension, stress and disrupted harmony. However, beneath the surface, lies a realm of potential growth, innovation and strengthened relationships. Being involved in conflict situations can provide each of us with profound opportunities to grow and learn. Sometimes this learning or other gifts we receive comes after hard labour that can rock our world. We might not see the gift in the moment, but hopefully distance and increasing perspective allows us to process our past difficult situations and find that nugget. Here are some gifts we should consider.

1. Awareness Building

Conflict helps us understand ourselves better and how others may perceive us. Awareness of ourselves transforms our ability to choose to 'respond' rather than 'react'. We are empowered through our choices. It leads us to take ownership of our thoughts, feelings and actions instead of seeing them as being 'caused' by another person or by a situation or experience.

2. Skill Development

Having exposure to conflict helps us develop our conflict resolution skill set- whether that's improving our listening skills or becoming more direct in our communication. Empathy is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another." Research has shown that empathy is not simply inborn but can actually be taught. We don't always get to pick our teachers, but they often come disguised as difficult people or difficult situations. Strengthening empathy and communication skills has certainly been a gift for me.

3. New Perspective

Taking time to really listen to the person you are in conflict with can create a fresh perspective. It's like taking the blinders off and panning the camera back to see the situation in a whole new light- a glorious painting that can create some wonder in our world.

4. Stronger Relationships

A concern I hear often from people who are reluctant to take part in a facilitated discussion with a co-worker, etc. is 'what if it makes it worse?' I can't predict the outcome of any conversation, but in my experience, a common comment after is "I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders." I've also encountered countless occasions where people feel that the conversation has strengthened a working relationship with a colleague, leader or friend, a gift truly needed in the workplace.

5. Perseverance

Difficult conversations take time, are messy and suck a lot of emotional energy. Staying in the messy can be hard because it is so uncomfortable and creates some psychological, and at times, physical squirming. Human nature calls to us to find a solution as soon as a problem presents itself. This does not give us the opportunity to dig deeper and find out what is really going on. A quick solution is often a band-aid on a vast wound causing the issue to resurface again and again. The ability to persevere enables us to continue to build understanding and be wary of the allure of a quick solution.

6. Challenging the Status Quo

Comfort and complacency can stifle progress for us and our teams. Conflict disrupts our status quo by making us question our assumptions and push our boundaries. It encourages a culture of



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continuous improvement where our outdated practices are challenged and replaced with more effective methods. Embracing conflict means embracing change, fostering an environment where innovation thrives and we can remain agile in our rapidly evolving world.

While encountering conflict in the workplace may initially seem daunting, it harbors valuable gifts for those willing to embrace it. By fostering creativity, strengthening relationships and encouraging personal growth, conflict can act as a catalyst for positive change within us and our teams. It challenges the status quo, enhances decision-making and resolves lingering issues that can otherwise fester.

Effective conflict management is not about eliminating conflict, but harnessing its potential to propel ourselves, our teams and our organization toward greater success. When approached with openness, respect and a willingness to learn, conflict transforms from a barrier into a bridge to innovation and stronger relationships in the workplace.

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