

Consensio in the Press

Published news articles in 2018





Welcome

Welcome to Consensio's 2018 News Round Up. This is our third annual collection of articles, showcasing our work in a wide range of HR and training publications.

In this edition, we feature nine of our favourite publications this year, which are divided into three areas: 1) Healthy Workplace Conflict, 2) Mediation and Transformation and 3) Skills Development.

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We hope that these publications will be thought-provoking and that the ideas discussed within them will assist you in enhancing your current workplace conflict management and mediation procedures.

If you would like to discuss our articles, workplace mediation or training services, please feel free to contact us on 0207 831 0254, info@consensiopartners.co.uk or via www.consensiopartners.co.uk

*Season's greetings from the Consensio team
and wishing you all the best for 2019*



Changing the culture of conflict

Training Journal | 12 July 2018 | Tania Coke

Tania Coke thinks a little conflict can be a good thing.

A new vision of organisational conflict is emerging. In this vision, conflict is no longer seen as a destructive force, destined to drag down morale, productivity and profits. Instead, conflict becomes an opportunity for learning and growth, which can increase creativity and boost motivation and performance.

For this to happen, things need to change. Change is needed not only at the level of the individual, but also at the level of the organisation. It's all very well changing the fish but, for lasting results, the water in the fish-tank also needs a change.

Here are the steps you can take to bring this vision of constructive conflict to life.

The healthy conflict organisation

Imagine if, whenever anyone contradicted or criticised you, you replied: 'How interesting! Tell me more about what you think and why.' And having heard them out in full, you then offered a full account of your own perspective. Now imagine that everyone in your organisation had this kind of conversation whenever conflict arose.

This is what I call the *healthy conflict organisation*. In it, situations which might normally lead to relationship break-downs, reduced motivation, dwindling productivity and profit, in fact lead in the opposite direction.

As a result of the kind of conversation described above, relationships become deeper and stronger. Personal motivation, self-awareness and creativity all rise. Financially, the organisation benefits too.

What would an organisation need to do to bring about this vision of conflict?

Learn from conflict

This vision is only possible if the people in the organisation are equipped with certain values and skills. Since our prevailing education system and social norms do not promote these values and skills, the organisation would need to provide appropriate training.

Through this training, employees would learn how to listen deeply to perspectives that contradict their own, and to express their own perspectives honestly and respectfully even in the face of opposition. Role-play exercises in particular can help to normalise the new approach to conflict and promote a culture of openness in which conflict is viewed as something to be explored, not avoided.

Align communications and processes

The conditions for constructive conflict also need to be built into the written communications of the organisation. Brochures, websites, newsletters, recruitment criteria, performance evaluation forms and all other documentation need to be consistent with the new values.

Even business pitches and proposals should reflect a desire to understand the clients' perspectives, express one's own and creatively address the differences. The same holds for the organisation's processes, in particular those governing conflict.

Employees who find themselves embroiled in destructive conflicts should be offered support from conflict experts who can help them to communicate openly and honestly with one another through mediation or other forms of facilitated conversations.

In situations where people in conflict are unwilling or unready to talk to one another directly, conflict coaching can be offered instead. Through one-on-one sessions with a trained conflict coach, people can gain new insights about themselves and their situations which can reverse the downward spiral of destructive conflict.

A new kind of leadership

But the new approach will never stick unless prominent figures in the organisation are on board. The way the CEO behaves in internal meetings, shareholder meetings and public events sets the tone for communication standards throughout the organisation.

The same applies to leaders at all levels of the organisation. In the typical organisation today, performance, outcomes and profits are prioritised over people and relationships. Team leaders act as if they are too busy to waste time talking about how people are getting on with one another.

But in the healthy conflict organisation, team leaders are aware of the potential costs of avoiding conflict and of the benefits of constructive conflict management. As a result, during team meetings and one-to-ones, the leader creates space for team members to explore differences of agreement and personality clashes, in the name of learning and growth.

The wellbeing of those within the organisation are treated as a priority and leaders take the responsibility of looking after their staff members seriously.

Transforming attitudes to conflict

Ultimately, what is required is a change in the way people think. The values and priorities of people across the organisation need to shift.

Instead of focusing only on measurable factors, such as units of production, number of hours worked and financial indicators, people genuinely need to value intangible elements, such as self-awareness, quality of relationships and mental health. Once these values have taken root in the organisation, the behaviours will follow suit.

Those responsible for handling conflict have a particular responsibility to embrace healthy conflict values. In their dealings with employees in conflict, they need to role-model the new approach. Everything they say and do must portray conflict as an opportunity to be explored and not an evil to be avoided.

They need the self-awareness to see when they are imposing their own agenda on other people's conflicts. They need the humility to accept that they do not always know what is best for other people. They need the creativity and openness to address each conflict and each person as unique.



What is the organisation for?

Fundamentally, the organisation's approach to conflict resolution is tied to the purpose of the organisation. If the organisation exists to make profit, then the chances of building a culture of healthy conflict are slim.

Training and processes can be put in place, but the culture will not change until human value is prioritised over economic value. In the healthy conflict organisation, people must be valued in their own right, not just as economic inputs.

When this happens, values, behaviours, processes and communications will shift – however slowly – and the organisation can expect to achieve a culture of healthy conflict where both humans and profits will flourish.

ENTREPRENEUR & INVESTOR

The brave new world of healthy workplace conflict

Entrepreneur & Investor | 12 September 2018 | Tania Coke

If your organisation is entirely free from workplace conflict, then this article is not for you. If, on the other hand, you are aware of conflicts of interest, disputes or disagreements arising in your organisation, then read on. In this article, we invite you to reflect on the way such disagreements are handled in your organisation and to consider whether there might be a better way to handle them, leading to healthier outcomes for all the individuals involved, as well as the organisation as a whole.

To begin with, cast your mind back to the last important team meeting you had. It may have been a board meeting or senior management team meeting, for instance. In that meeting, can you remember a moment when two or more people disagreed on a significant point? When the disagreement became evident, how did you personally feel? How did you react? Did you say or do anything? And how do you think the people around you felt? How did they react? Looking at the bigger picture, what has been the longer-term effect of this incident on the people involved, their relationships with one another and on the finances and performance of the organisation?

The benefit of hindsight

Now replay the meeting in your mind, but this time imagine the difficult conversation unfolding in what you think would have been a more ideal way. For instance, perhaps there was a moment when you vehemently disagreed with what someone said, but you didn't do or say anything about it. With the benefit of hindsight, you think you should have picked up on the point and expressed your own, different opinion. Or maybe you did express yourself, but in a way that in retrospect you think was unhelpful. Looking back at the incident, you feel that you could have reacted in a more constructive way. Perhaps you think you should have first asked the other person to explain what they meant, before expressing your own opinion. Or maybe you think it would have been most helpful to repeat back what you heard them say and ask if you had understood correctly.

Having reimagined the scene, now consider what might have been the longer-term effect of the incident, had it unfolded in this way. A conversation which in reality dampened the team's productivity, reduced profitability and left a sour taste in everyone's mouth, might instead have helped to open people's minds to new ways of thinking, built mutual respect and understanding, unlocked creativity and boosted productivity and profit. In other words, under certain circumstances, conflict can lead to a downward spiral of stress, bitterness and financial loss. However, if handled differently, it can actually be a force for good.

Multiple choices

Of course, we cannot know for sure what the outcome of an imaginary courageous conversation would have been. The point is that, in any situation, we have many choices about how to express ourselves and how to react to others. Each choice will lead to a different outcome. The more aware we are of our power to control our behaviour, and the more we exercise this power through conscious choice, the more chance we have of converting conflict into something healthy and positive.

One of the challenges we face in doing this is habit. We tend to develop habitual ways of responding to conflict. By repeatedly responding in a certain way, we end up trapped and find it difficult to break out into other types of responses. Another reason why it is difficult to respond to conflict in a healthy way is that conflict can trigger emotional and physical reactions that sabotage our better selves. With the luxury of hindsight, it is easy to imagine a healthy way to respond to conflict. But in the heat of the moment, as the blood rises to our head, and feelings of rage, guilt or self-pity flood our senses, we end up behaving in ways we later regret.

Through conflict resolution and mediation training we can tackle these challenges and transform the way we respond to conflict. By studying theories and frameworks such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, we can gain awareness of new ways of handling conflict conversations. Through role-play, we can try out these unfamiliar behaviours in a low-risk, learning environment. Role-play can also help to build empathy towards people who respond to conflict in different ways from us. A good trainer, workplace mediator or conflict coach can also encourage us to build helpful habits, such as taking time after difficult meetings to reflect on what happened, and imagine different ways we could have behaved, in order to bring about a better outcome.

The bottom line is that we each have the power to choose how we respond to conflict, and by exercising that power, we can convert conflict into a healthy part of organisational life.



Diverse workforces

HRD Connect | 6 June 2018 | Tania Coke

The changing world of work is upon us, and with it comes challenges. For instance, I do not envy the human moderators working for Facebook. On the one hand, they have to uphold Facebook's mission of embracing diverse views. On the other, their job is to censor views which are harmful to society and they have just seconds to tell the difference. Business could learn from these numerous challenges.

A similar challenge is faced by many companies today. Take the case of James Damore at Google. Damore wrote an internal memo criticising the company's diversity policies and justifying the predominance of male employees on the basis of biological differences between men and women. Google had to decide whether Damore's memo should be punished as disrespectful towards women or tolerated on the basis of freedom of speech. They chose the former. Damore and his supporters saw this as proof that the organisation had gone too far in its attempts to be inclusive and that Google was no longer a place where people felt able to share opinions freely.

Setting aside the particularities of the Damore case, the story raises an important question facing HR: how to ensure that policing of discriminatory attitudes does not end up stifling debate. More generally, how to ensure that greater diversity in the workforce leads to more openness, tolerance and creativity, and not less.

The nature of words

The difficulty is, for me, tied up with the nature of words. As any workplace mediator will tell you, forming judgements on the basis of words alone is a dangerous business. Words are labels that we use to express private meaning. There is a certain amount of public consensus as to what words mean. But only up to a point. My understanding of the word "love", for instance, is based on my own experience of what I call "love", and my exposure to the word over the course of my lifetime. Words mean different things to different people. We should be careful not to treat any words, including "inclusion" and "equality", as sacrosanct.

Luckily, unless we are under the same kind of time pressures as Facebook's moderators, we don't have to take words at face value. In workplace mediation, we have the luxury of a full day to explore the impact of language and what parties in conflict mean by the words that they use. Even in a busy work environment, there are things we can do to get beyond the surface. We can create opportunities to spend time with the author of the words, ask them questions, listen to the tone of their voice and observe their facial expressions and body language. This will help us to build a deeper understanding of what was meant by their words.

In some cases, we may find that the offending words are indeed indicative of an attitude we find distasteful but, as a result of getting to know the person better, we are able to understand why they hold that attitude. We may even recognise that we too might have developed such an attitude if we had lived the life they have.

It can also be helpful to remember that most people, at times, say things with which they themselves disagree. I often say things in the heat of the moment which later I regret. I also sometimes say things I don't actually believe, in an attempt to make a certain impression. And sometimes the words just come out wrong. So, as individuals, we can decide, when confronted with apparently discriminatory language, to postpone making a judgement until we've taken the time to investigate what was really meant.

Conflict faultlines

There are also things that can be done at the level of the organisation, to preserve the twin goals of freedom of speech and inclusiveness. Every organisation has what at Consensio we call "conflict faultlines." These are the controversial issues around which opinion is polarised, often creating opposing camps within the organisation. These may be specific to the organisation (such as whether to endorse the CEO's new corporate policy) or not (such as Brexit). Conflict faultlines are usually not difficult to spot. But it is rare for organisations to do anything about them. There are ways to bring these controversial issues out into the open, to help people get beneath the surface of the issue. This could be done through facilitated conversations in which people are invited to express their opinions, listen to one another and engage in dialogue to build mutual understanding. It can be done at the level of the team, or at the level of the organisation, through large townhall style meetings.

Growing numbers of organisations are offering communication training to foster the skills and attitudes that will promote healthy debate of this kind. Most people are not trained to communicate in this way. We easily get outraged and jump to conclusions without bothering to explore the underlying intentions and meanings. But, through training, we can learn to resist the urge to form snap opinions and engage others with an open mind in order to understand them better. We can also train people to express themselves better to avoid causing offence or outrage. Frameworks such as nonviolent communication can help people convey their feelings without blame or judgement. Role plays carried out in the safety of the training room are an opportunity to find new ways of communicating about sensitive topics. By practicing these courageous conversations in a training room, we will be more able to have them in the workplace.

Lastly, organisations can make efforts to ensure that there are role models capable of demonstrating these kinds of communication skill, especially amongst senior leadership. If leaders can be seen engaging with differences of opinion – and enquiring into those opinions even when on the surface they seem objectionable – the chances are the rest of the workforce will follow suit. If leaders do the opposite, it's almost impossible for the organisation to create a culture of healthy debate.

Diversity in the workplace is undoubtedly an opportunity for greater creativity and tolerance. But to build a truly inclusive corporate culture, there is a lot of work to be done to get beneath the surface of our differences.



Why it's time to humanise the workplace

HR Zone | 23 November 2018 | Tania Coke

How often do you have meaningful conversations with colleagues at work? If the answer is 'rarely', then find out why it's time to make a positive, conscious change in the way you approach workplace relationships.

Mental health seems to be top of the HR agenda at the moment. This is thanks in part to the efforts of Prince William and others who have opened up about their own battles with mental health and launched initiatives to tackle the issue.

Importantly, many of these initiatives focus on the nature of our interactions at work. For instance, the 'Time to Change' campaign advised us on Mental Health Day to "ask twice", giving people a chance to go deeper than the usual "fine, thanks" when asked "how are you?".

At Consensio, we agree that the quality of workplace interactions plays a vital part in mental health. In this article, we suggest three ways to have courageous conversations at work that are deeper, healthier and more humane.

The whole person

There is a tendency at work to focus on the rational, intellectual content of discussions. The person taking minutes at a meeting, for instance, typically picks out the logical arguments made in favour and against each issue, and records the practical decisions made.

We can train ourselves to see one another as more complex beings, made up of intellect, emotion, body, intuition, and imagination.

But there is so much more going on in every interaction. For instance, there are the emotions and moods of the people in the room, which undoubtedly influence the quality and outcome of the meeting. And there is the physical, corporeal dimension - as seen in the postures, gestures, actions and positioning of people in the room (all of which also give information about what is really going on).

The tendency to prioritise the intellectual dimension can have a damaging effect on the quality of our relationships. If we only acknowledge the rational in one another, we are missing out on so much that makes each person who they are. And this can pave the way for misunderstanding, loneliness and depression – the ingredients for mental ill-health.

But we can train ourselves to see one another as more complex beings, made up of intellect, emotion, body, intuition, imagination and more. In our conversations, we can pay more attention to the emotions expressed by others and ourselves. We can and should talk about our feelings, doubts and inner conflicts, without fear of appearing unprofessional.



We can allow our imaginations to roam, as we did when we were children. We can share our intuitions without feeling obliged to provide logical explanations. We can give ourselves permission to talk about things that appear unrelated to work. And we can pay more attention to body language: the speed of a gesture, which direction the body is facing, the way the head is inclined.

Just noticing these things can make a difference: consciously or not, we know whether someone is seeing us a human being, as opposed to a source of information or a means to some other end.

The present moment

We spend much of our time at work waiting for the future to begin. We start the day with a list of things to do and spend the rest of the day trying to tick things off the list so we can move onto the next.

We are trained to look for ways to change and fix and improve. Professional development rarely includes the art of observing how things currently are. Our whole mode of being at work is geared towards the future. This does not make for healthy interactions.

As an antidote, in your next conversation, pay attention to what is happening at each moment, without trying to achieve, decide or solve anything.

We pay less and less attention to the people sitting next to us and more and more to what's happening on our screens.

Notice not only what the other person says, but how they say it, through the pitch and tone of their voice. Notice the way they move, sit, react. Notice the contradictions between what they say and what they express through their voice, face or body.

Try reflecting your observations back to them. If you notice they have less energy than usual, mention it, or even ask them why. At the same time, pay attention to yourself. If you suddenly feel irritated or offended, include it in your awareness.

You may want to voice it and make room in the conversation to discuss it. Notice your own posture and physical behaviour. Notice if you are jiggling a leg, or drumming your fingers on the table, or if your body is turned away from the other person.

All of this information can unlock a deeper understanding of ourselves and others, and yield richer, more human experiences and interactions at work.

Openness to change

Sometimes our relationships suffer because we get too attached to the past. I may get so attached to an opinion that I'm unable to change my thinking even in the face of new evidence. Over time, the opinion hardens to a prejudice and I no longer want to spend time with people who think differently.

The concept of *unconscious bias* is now well documented in HR theory, but in practice we all still have work to do to gain awareness of our biases. Every conversation is an opportunity to expand our worldview.

In workplace mediation, we encourage parties in conflict to open themselves up to new perspectives. Of course, we are not obliged to agree with other people's opinions, but we can still take time to inquire into them, and gain understanding of what lies behind those opinions.

Set yourself a target of having a real conversation, of the kind described above, at least once a day.

If in a conversation someone expresses an opinion opposed to your own, resist the urge to agree or disagree. Instead, ask them why they think it. Ask them why it matters to them. Even if in the end you decide to stick with our original opinion, the quality of your interaction and the depth of your relationship will have benefited.

A conversation a day to keep the doctor at bay...

It is not surprising that we struggle to communicate in this way at work. We feel the pressure of time and the need to produce tangible results.

We also live in an age of digital communication, which can have the opposite effect on our interactions: we pay less and less attention to the people sitting next to us and more and more to what's happening on our screens; we seek out opinions on social media that reinforce our own. We need to train ourselves to overcome these influences and change our habits.

Here's one suggestion: set yourself a target of having a real conversation, of the kind described above, at least once a day. Allow yourself even ten minutes to be fully present.

Give attention to what is being expressed, emotionally, physically, intellectually and beyond. And use the conversation as an opportunity to open yourself up to new and unexpected ways of thinking, acting and being.

The more we can build these attitudes into our interactions at work, the healthier and more humane our relationships will be.



How mediation can help resolve workplace conflicts in the NHS

Healthcare Leader | 17 July 2018 | Karl Cockerill

My mediation journey is a story of transformation, not just for me, but also for the NHS trust I work for. Over a decade ago, I was a union rep known as the ‘grievance king.’ Now, I am the mediation coordinator of our internal mediation service and I have been involved in over 100 workplace mediations.

Before 2007, I thought that the only way to deal with workplace conflict was by putting in a grievance. And as a union rep, that is what I recommended to everyone who came to see me. Like many union reps, I thought that mediation would take work away from us.

In 2007, a new Director of Human Resources, Karen Bailey, who was also an accredited workplace mediator, started working at our trust. At the time, we had about 40-50 bullying and harassment or grievance cases per year. Most of these were lodged by me on behalf of our members.

I remember one case I was involved in where there was a lot of tension between two teams. Karen offered to facilitate a meeting, and at first, I did not want any part in it. I thought this was just another way to take away workers’ rights. However, I reluctantly agreed, and the session was enlightening. Later Karen told us that it had been mediation.

Consensio was brought in to deliver an in-house accredited mediation training course to our trust and I was one of the delegates on the course. I remember nearly walking out of the training on the first day but I stuck with it and slowly my mindset shifted. I could see that workplace mediation was not about taking away rights, but about finding a fair and collaborative way to resolve conflicts, many of which are caused by misunderstandings. I could see how mediation was not a way to put unions out of work, but to help those in conflict to resolve their issues in a much more constructive way.

After the course, I became the Trust’s mediation coordinator with another HR mediator, and I found the role extremely rewarding and sometimes challenging. In 2010, our PCT workforce merged with ELHT and the mediation coordinator role was taken away. I was disappointed as I was now a real advocate of informal process and I had been able to reach lots of staff members through my union work.

In the period between 2010 and 2015, cases of bullying and harassment shot up again. The trust looked to mediation again, but this time with a different approach. Mediation now sits in the Occupational Health (OH) Department, and, since the introduction of a coordinator, our mediation service is thriving.

What I have learned along my journey is that there is nothing positive about formal process. It actually prolongs the outcome and doesn’t resolve the issue. When in conflict, people need to talk about things to resolve them.

There are lots of reasons why mediation is so successful at our trust. For example, the fact that HR is 100% behind mediation, and most calls to refer a case to mediation come from HR. OH also refers to the service. A lot of cases can be caught by having OH involved. Many people who will benefit from mediation go to OH as they are stressed and anxious, and often become ill and go off on sickness leave.

There is a lot that other organisations can learn from our journey.

Firstly, the importance of having a mediation coordinator and a champion within the organisation. In my case, I have been involved in over 100 mediations, not necessarily as mediator, but as a coordinator who is out there speaking to managers who want to refer a case to our service. I also speak with staff members who are in conflict and I encourage them to go to mediation rather than down a formal route.

Secondly, our mediation service sits within OH, which addresses staff health and wellbeing. It is therefore seen as impartial and people are more likely to use it. However, HR is fully supporting mediation, which is also key.

Last year, Consensio trained us to become team mediators and we have already done a number of successful team mediations.

There have been challenges. I know that getting the unions on board is critical to the success of mediation. We have worked hard to convince the unions that they won't be left out and that they will be part of our mediation journey. That's why we have trained some of our union reps to be internal mediators. We have also trained HR to be mediators, as well as some managers.

We still have a way to go in terms of raising awareness of our mediation service and educating people about it. We are in the process of aligning our policies so that there is one policy which includes mediation. We are going to go out and promote our service more widely, including via internal communications.

We are ambitious for mediation at the trust, and there is much more to do. If we train our managers to spot issues quickly and to know when to intervene, we will catch cases before they even reach OH or HR.

It has been an interesting decade from me as I went through the transformation from grievance king to mediation convert. I hope that other trusts will look into embedding mediation. The rewards are so huge, both in terms of cost-savings as well as employee wellbeing.



Speaking from the soul in mediation

UK Mediation Journal | 14 August 2018 | Tania Coke

I've recently become aware in myself of two very different voices. One I call my social voice. It is a respectable, adult voice, which justifies things on the basis of logic and social convention. It favours long words and buzz words and doesn't mind a bit of jargon. The other voice, I call my personal voice. It is simpler and more emotional. It rarely feels the need to justify itself. When it does, it says "because I want to" or "that's how I feel".

My social voice lends me a persona which can be helpful in impressing people or asserting my credentials. But when I want to speak from the soul, it's the personal voice that I need. It helps me to express myself more honestly. It helps me to connect more deeply with others. It makes me feel more alive, more authentic, more me. But it takes courage to use this voice. At the first hint of mockery or cynicism, it clams up. I go silent, or the social voice takes over.

I've been thinking about which voice I need as a workplace mediator. I know that the way I talk and listen as a mediator will influence, however subtly, the way the parties talk and listen. If I start the meeting using mediation jargon and legal terminology, it will set a certain tone for the conversation. If I speak in the first person, using words that are simple and down-to-earth, it will invite a different type of conversation.

For me, the power of mediation is that it helps people in conflict to reconnect at a personal level. Conflict makes us depersonalise and often demonise the person we're in conflict with. We lose sight of their humanity and lose touch with our own. Mediation is an opportunity to rediscover the other person as a fellow human being, who is suffering, just like me, and who does things they regret, just like me. Speaking from the Soul in Mediation I and who battles with their pride, just like me. For that to happen, we need to strip away the masks, the formalities and anything that puts up a barrier between two people and their souls. As mediators, we can help people do that through the words we choose and the way we say them.

But it takes courage to drop the mediator's mask and sit there, with the parties, as just another human being. All sorts of fears creep in. What if the parties think I'm unprofessional? Will they take me seriously? How can I justify my value as a mediator if I don't play the part? But that's my social voice speaking. And it's precisely the one that separates me from my self and from others. One thing I can do is to remind myself, whilst mediating, that I also suffer conflict, do things I regret, and battle with my pride. I also could do with the help of a mediator from time to time. Another thing I can do is to pay more attention to the way I express myself in day-to-day life. Am I speaking from the head or am I speaking from the soul? With greater awareness I can make better choices and help to bring about more honest, courageous conversations, in mediation and beyond.



We know about IQ and EQ, but what about PQ?

Training Zone | 14 March 2018 | Tania Coke

A species evolves by developing new ways of understanding and responding to its environment. Over the last 20 years or so, the office-dwelling species has taken an evolutionary leap by recognising EQ alongside IQ. Prior to this, corporate employees were largely recruited, assessed and valued on the basis of their intellect...

Then Daniel Goleman offered a framework to analyse and develop emotional intelligence. There were at first those in the business world who scoffed at the idea of valuing soft skills. Nowadays, even the most left-brained institution acknowledges the value of self-awareness and people skills.

But what is next for the evolution of the office-dwelling species?

We propose a new dimension of human intelligence for the 21st century: physical intelligence (PQ).

In the days of cave-dwelling, physical prowess was a matter of life and death. Obtaining food, evading predators and building shelter were all dependent on physical faculties such as the sense of smell, sense of direction, hand-eye co-ordination and muscular strength.

For most office workers today, the body has no role to play in finding food, safety and shelter – except perhaps the fingers when typing in credit card details and clicking “buy”. In working life too, the body has been gradually losing relevance. Potters, thatchers and blacksmiths, for instance, needed a highly developed sense of sight, touch and rhythm.

These professions, and so many others, have been replaced or disembodied by automation. In communication too, the body used to play a central role; leaders and orators used their bodies to captivate audiences through physical presence and expression. But, since the advent of audio-visual technology, our powers of corporeal expression have dwindled.

Little by little, the need for physical intelligence is being eroded by technology and specialisation

The vast office-dwelling population has to wait until after working hours to engage the body in a meaningful way. We do use the body at work, of course. It transports us from meeting to meeting. But its role is not valued, nor is physical intelligence assessed or trained as part of professional development.

But must it be that way? Could we not conceive a more noble role for the human body, even in this age of ever-increasing automation? Below are three ideas out of many for how physical intelligence could be promoted in office life, and how this would benefit our wellbeing.

Wellbeing and the body

Engaging the body during the working day improves health and vitality and enhances mental performance. Many companies offer gym membership on that basis but a workout at the gym is not the only way to re-energise using the body, nor is it everyone's cup of tea.

Employees could be encouraged to find their own creative and humanising ways to revitalise during the working day. Some might even choose activities which serve a practical purpose, such as tending the office plants, sweeping leaves or cooking lunch for the team.

There could be all sorts of unexpected benefits – such as more engaged and satisfied staff – alongside the primary benefits of enhanced wellbeing and mental performance.

Communication and the body

It is hard to deny that the body plays a role in communication. But the skills of corporeal expression are vastly under-developed, relative to verbal skills.

When preparing to give a presentation, for instance, what percentage of time is spent working on physical expression, as opposed to time spent developing the verbal message?

And don't forget, it is not only during presentations that the body is communicating; we express ourselves physically the whole time, whether we are aware of it or not, and whether we like it or not.

How might we set about improving our powers of physical communication?

As with any skill, the first step is to increase awareness. We can train ourselves to pay more attention to the physical expression of others. What is the speed and rhythm of their movements? What kind of gestures do they use? How do they position themselves in space relative to others? Just by paying greater attention to people's body language, we can derive benefits.

When you pay attention to someone's body language, they will sense it, consciously or not. This in itself can create better rapport.

Moreover, with the information you gain by paying attention, you can get to know someone better. Just as learning something new about a client's personal life can help you to understand them better, learning something new about their physical self-expression is a way of building rapport. You can also verbalise your observations to let them know they have your attention. In conflict conversations, this can be particularly effective. You might for instance say: "I noticed that you winced just now. Was there something I said that upset you?"

As well as learning to observe others, we can learn to become more aware of our own physical expression

Did I have my back turned to someone throughout a meeting? Was I unconsciously tapping my foot during a conversation? Have I been walking about with my shoulders hunched up all morning? Am I breathing more rapidly because I feel stressed? And we can learn to regulate our behaviour, and make more conscious, intelligent choices about how to stand, walk, breathe and move in response to the people around us.

If I notice, for instance, that a colleague is gesticulating and moving very fast, I could decide to speed up my own movements to match theirs. Or I may decide to slow my movements down in order to influence theirs. Or, if I am in conflict with someone, can we both regulate our breathing and heart rate to have a more productive conversation to resolve our issues? These choices are only possible if I know how to pay attention and to regulate my own physical expression.

Creativity and the body

As well as boosting energy and improving communication skills, the body is also a source of creativity that can help us solve problems and work better. At the simplest level, we can trigger new ideas just by engaging the body, like Archimedes' eureka moment when he climbed into the bath.

We can also consciously involve the body in problem-solving to tap into new kinds of intelligence. For instance, by expressing a problem as a physical metaphor and enacting it through the body, we can open up new solutions and ways of thinking. Another well-established approach to understanding problems and relationships is the constellation methodology, which can unlock new perspectives and insights through the wisdom of the body.

The body is an untapped source of energy, connectedness and creativity. With enough imagination and courage, we can use it to bring new vitality and creativity to our human resources. More importantly, by acknowledging PQ alongside IQ and EQ, we can help to ensure a more healthy and humane future for the office-dwelling race.



Empathy: The hard but important skill

Virgin | 19 November 2018 | Alex Efthymiades

Empathy has become something of a buzz word in business recently. Alex Efthymiades, co-founder of workplace mediation experts Consensio, explores why and how workplaces can encourage more empathy...

In this article you will learn:

- **What other people have said about empathy**
- **Why empathy is important**
- **How companies are encouraging their employees to be more empathic**

A few years ago, I read an article in the Harvard Business Review titled ‘Corporate Empathy is not an Oxymoron’. The article discusses the importance of corporate empathy and states: “Empathy should be embedded into the entire organisation: There is nothing soft about it. It is a hard skill that should be required from the board-room to the shop floor.”

More recently, mainstream publications such as Forbes and the Financial Times have published similar articles, outlining the many benefits of corporate empathy. At Consensio, we have been trying to foster this idea for over a decade. For us, it seems obvious that empathic workplaces significantly contribute to employee wellbeing and therefore an organisation’s success. However, although organisations are beginning to recognise the need for corporate empathy, the theory is sometimes still very far from the practice.

There are many reasons why empathy is relevant and important in the workplace. One reason for this is that respect, feeling valued and empathy go hand-in-hand. It is when we show empathy for people that we work with, be they our superiors, colleagues or employees, that they are more likely to feel respected and valued. We all want to feel that our contributions are noted, but also that how we are as people is respected. We all want to feel that we are treated as a human being in the workplace.

As a workplace mediation and conflict management provider, the concept of corporate empathy, or lack thereof, comes up over and over in our work with clients. We see a general trend in that many people at work don’t feel respected or valued and they don’t feel that the organisation for which they work cares about them. Just last month, the Financial Times published an interview with Zeynep Ton, who set up the Good Job Institute in the US last year “to help companies flourish by creating better jobs.” According to Professor Ton, who interviewed service workers, “respect” was one word she kept hearing too. It is undeniable that the culture of our workplace has a significant impact on our wellbeing.

Understanding and appreciating what workers within all levels of an organisation are going through results in a more empathic and caring culture. And it is this culture that fosters loyalty, trust and respect.



Yet the focus continues to be on equipping people with the technical skills to do their jobs, and not the people skills to become empathic leaders. Why? Because there is still the inherent belief in most organisations that emotions have no place in corporate life. That bringing emotions, or indeed empathy, to the corporate landscape is unprofessional, soft and irrelevant to the job at hand.

But empathy is not a soft skill, but a skill that organisations would do well to harness. This can be achieved in different ways, for example by training your leaders on how empathy can help them become more effective leaders by listening to the people that they manage, by respecting their opinions (even if you disagree with them), and by showing that you care about them as people. There are also small steps that each of us can take to bring more empathy to our place of work; to momentarily silence our opinions, to try to see our colleagues' points of view, and to take the time to really listen to the perspectives of others. This approach takes time, which is a precious commodity in the current workplace, where we are being asked to do more with less. However, empathy investment will result in a more engaged workforce, and ultimately, business success.



How courageous conversations can resolve workplace conflicts

Personnel Today | 25 June 2018 | Tania Coke

Why do so many managers shy away from having tough conversations with employees? Knowing what to say at the right time can help nip conflicts and other issues in the bud, explains Tania Coke from workplace mediation specialists Consensio.

When I have a problem with a colleague, I know that the sensible thing to do is to get together as soon as possible and talk it through.

That way, we can share perspectives on what has happened, clarify any misunderstandings and decide what to do before the situation gets worse.

But we're not always sensible in these situations. We all struggle to have these conversations, and to have them successfully.

At Consensio, we decided to pool our experiences and produce a practical guide to having "courageous conversations" at work.

What are the barriers?

First, we tried to understand what prevents us from having courageous conversations. We found three main barriers:

Lack of confidence:

When we feel hurt by someone, speaking to them is often the last thing we want to do. There are many things we may fear which knock our confidence. These include: getting hurt; hurting the other person; not being understood; losing control; and/or making things worse. As a result, we procrastinate or withdraw, and hope that the problem will go away.

Lack of skill:

We also often lack the skills that enable us to carry out the conversation successfully. These include self-awareness, self-control and effective communication strategies.

The good news is that through conflict management training and skills practice, we can learn to listen with empathy and communicate effectively even in the most difficult situation.

Lack of time:

The final barrier to courageous conversations is that they take time. It takes time to build the skills and confidence to do them well. It takes time to reflect and prepare for a courageous conversation.

And it takes time to have the conversation itself. Given the slightest excuse, the conversation gets postponed, abandoned or botched.

How to have a courageous conversation

What can we do to have more courageous conversations, and to have them successfully?

Before the conversation:

Whenever a situation flares up, we first need to acknowledge that something is troubling us. We can then ask ourselves questions such as: What am I feeling and why? What am I frightened of and why? This can help us manage the fear and stress that the situation has aroused.

We then need to make a decision about whether to have the courageous conversation or not. It can help to consider what we stand to gain or lose by having the conversation and how other people will be affected by our decision.

If we decide to go ahead, we can prepare for the conversation through questions such as: What do I want to express and how can I best do this? What do I want to understand from the other person and how should I ask them?

Finally, we need to set up the conversation. Here again, there are many factors to consider, such as: How should I raise the topic with the other person? Where should we have the conversation and when?

During the conversation:

There are a number of handy hints for conducting a courageous conversation as smoothly and productively as possible.

These include: Remember that the way you speak and act at the outset will set the tone for the rest of the conversation. Try to express yourself without casting blame. As well as the words you use, be aware of your facial expressions and body language.

Share your goal in having the conversation and ask about theirs. Let them know you are having the conversation in order to make things better, not worse. If your attitude is one of openness and curiosity towards the other person, this will be reflected through the way you speak and act.

Finally, be prepared to forgive both yourself and the other person if things don't go as smoothly as you hoped.

After the conversation:

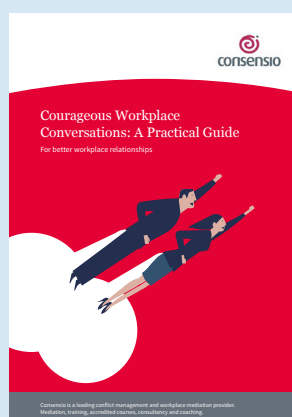
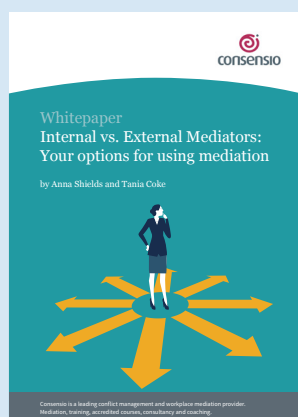
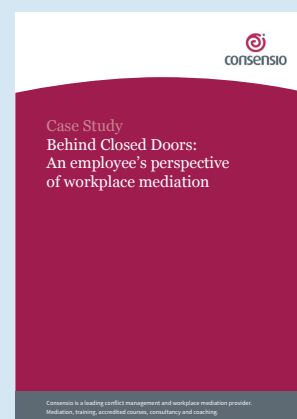
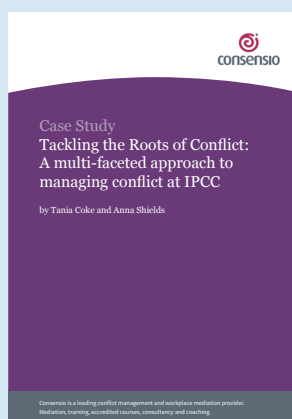
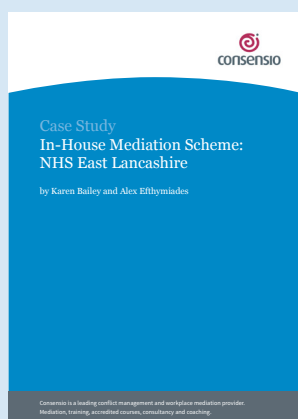
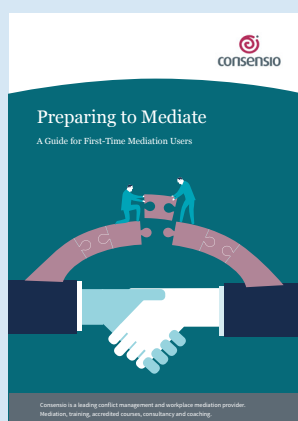
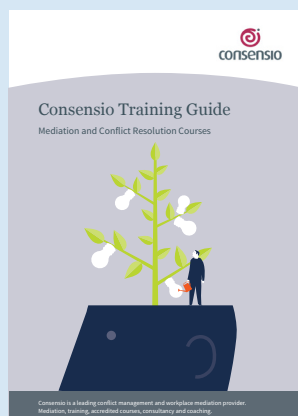
There are things we can do to ease the discomfort that may follow a courageous conversation and extend the opportunities for learning and change. For instance, we can get in touch with the other person to thank them for the conversation. It is also a good idea to reflect on what you have learnt, and what you can do to manage conflict better in the future.

Courageous conversations are important. They are a way to humanise the workplace, and they help to build a culture which values people as people, not just as human resources. The responsibility for having these conversations lies with all of us.

Consensio publications

We have published a range of helpful guides, factsheets, case studies and whitepapers to benefit UK workplaces.

All are available to download free from our website or by contacting us on 020 7831 0254.



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