

INTERDEPENDENCE DAY

September 12, *next day, next step*

Conflict as a Crisis in Human INTERaction

an exercise submitted by
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Kind of Exercise: Personal reflections on experience with conflict as demonstrated in drawings made by participants.

Time Requirements: 30 minutes

Number of Participants: 5-50

Intention of the exercise:

To focus awareness on the quality of human interaction during a conflict.

Conflict is about the way people interact with each other, not simply a problem to be solved. People have process needs in difficult dialogues that shape the actual outcomes. Process needs include clarity and strength of self and understanding/openness to others.

Equipment Requirements:

Paper and markers available for each participant.

Instructions:

1. Presenter invites participants to reflect on their experience with conflict to identify what bothers people most about conflict and to come up with a definition of conflict.
2. Presenter asks participants to bring to mind a particularly difficult conflict situation that did not turn out positively. With this in mind, the participants are then asked by the presenter to draw a picture that captures what it was like to be in that situation. Emphasize that this need not be a great work of art, and that participants may use symbols/stick figures to convey the experience.
3. Reassure participants that they will not be asked to share the details of that conflict situation, but rather to reflect on what it felt like to be in that situation - what the experience of being in conflict with another person really involves.
4. Allow five to ten minutes for participants to complete their drawing, and then ask for volunteers to share their drawing with the large group or in small groups of three.

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5. As people describe their drawings, identify themes related to:

Strength of self: people feeling weak, burdened, trapped, stuck, small
Connections with others: misunderstood, wall between them, not heard

6. Summarize by asking people to come up with a definition of conflict. In your discussion of definitions, emphasize that conflict is a crisis in human interaction. This goes beyond the definition of conflict as a concrete problem to be solved or a perceived competition over resources.

7. In dealing with difficult dialogues, the purpose and focus needs to be on maintaining high quality human interaction that is characterized by each person's own clarity and confidence in the decision-making process AND in equal measure their willingness to be influenced by and open to the perspectives of others.

Pitfalls that might be encountered:

Overemphasis on concrete details and issues or blaming the other as the source of the conflict.

What to do to get out of the Pit:

Focus on process needs such as: having a say and knowing that you've been heard and understood by the other. Invite participants to think about difficult dialogues that turned out well in the sense that they felt heard and understood, and that they found themselves agreeing to disagree. Notice moments when things appeared to improve, what was going on at that moment?

Follow-up Dialogue:

When do disagreements become conflicts?

How might trying to solve concrete issues actually get in the way of process needs?

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