



Expose **latent conflicts** before they degenerate

The challenge

Many in-company conflicts are not discussed: people assume that it won't change anything, they are afraid of making the situation worse, etc. Some subjects are indeed not worth bringing up, but many apparently minor disagreements hide deep-rooted problems that people tend to hush up. Daring to bring these issues into the open is the best way of preventing them from deteriorating into serious conflicts, for which it will be harder to find a solution.

A pro-active approach

As a manager you should help people in your team admit that a conflict exists in order to be able to deal with it actively. That requires both lucidity and courage on your part.

LUCIDITY

Rather than being satisfied with an apparently serene climate in your team, pay attention to signs of disagreement or frustration: they may be warning signs of a conflict to be taken seriously.

Recognize the attitudes that reveal hidden conflict

AVOIDANCE	Your employees choose to ignore a conflictual situation and prefer avoiding each other.	E.g.: To avoid friction, two departments limit opportunities for collaboration at all costs.
PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE	Everyone identifies and recognizes the problem but they all "live with it".	E.g.: An employee silently takes charge of the work of an inefficient colleague.
COMPETITION	Everyone acts in their own interest and constantly tries to take advantage over the others.	E.g.: People denigrate each other, denounce each other or work against each other's interests.
DEFENSIVE	Everyone tries to cover their backs and is always ready to defend themselves if they feel threatened.	E.g.: Individuals avoid making decisions on their own, accumulate information to be able to justify themselves, etc.
PERMANENT NEGOTIATION	Progress is made by reciprocal concessions without solving the real problem.	E.g.: An employee accepts a certain task on condition that a colleague accepts another, while their individual responsibilities remain unclarified.
UNWILLINGNESS	Without openly expressing their opposition, your employees display "passive resistance".	E.g.: Reticence in collaborating, delays in implementing decisions.
RENUNCIATION	Your employees choose to flee from the problem.	E.g.: Transfer request, resignation.

COURAGE

It is your job to bring people in your team who "bury their heads in the sand", to admit the existence of a conflict. This is an essential step in preventing hidden conflicts from deteriorating.

Demonstrate the value of exposing and managing these hidden conflicts

CONVICTIONS WHICH LEAD PEOPLE TO HIDE CONFLICT	WHAT TO REPLY?
"If everyone were reasonable, there wouldn't be any conflict."	Show that conflict is inevitable in a company: not everyone has exactly the same objectives, culture, past experiences, etc. ➔ It is therefore legitimate to talk about it .
"I should be able to solve the problem myself."	Underline that the people who are the most involved are not necessarily in the best position to resolve conflict. A second opinion can help them do so, without calling into question their skill or autonomy. ➔ It is therefore useful to talk about it .
"I'm going to make a bad impression/I risk being penalized."	Insist on the usefulness of conflict which often enables new ideas to emerge. ➔ It is therefore constructive to bring it up .
"The problem is not so bad."	Explain the consequences of conflict: if it lasts too long, repeats or worsens, if it spreads throughout the company, etc. ➔ It is necessary to deal with it .