A group of people posing for the camera

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***People Management Resources***

***Follow-up session***

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

*Self-learning module on Tembo:* [*https://tembo.msf.org/course/view.php?id=333&section=8*](https://tembo.msf.org/course/view.php?id=333&section=8)

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| **Objectives**   * Understand the Ladder of Inference model and how it applies to real life situation * Identify what are the needs of persons involved in conflict situations |

**Duration : 85 minutes**

**WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

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| --- | --- |
| 10’ | ***If first/only session***  Take a moment for:   * ice-breaking * propose/co-design working agreement (no judgement, participation, confidentiality…) |
| ***If other sessions before***  Take a moment to   * welcome participants, quick ice-breaker/energizer * come back to last session (what they remember, what they applied…) |
| 5’ | **Introduction**  Ask: ***On a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel with conflict situations?***  *Online session*: use the Zoom poll/ ask to write in the chat  *Face to face***:** position yourself on a line going from 1 to 10  **Objectives**   * Understand the Ladder of Inference model and how it applies to real life situation * Identify what are the needs of persons involved in conflict situations   **Outline**   * We will discover a new model, the Ladder of Inference, and reflect on past experiences to see how it played out * We will revisit experiences with conflict in our team and identify what were the needs of the persons involved |
| 10’ | Explain/remind the Ladder of inference model (see explanations at the end of this sessions outline). Leave it visible for participants to refer to it in next activity (or send picture through Zoom chat) |
| 25’ | **Activity 1**   * In sub-groups (20 min), participants share a situation where the Ladder of inference played out. The other participants help them to identify the different steps, and how the situation could have been managed to avoid a conflict/tension. If participants have enough time, they can move to another story |
| 5’ | **BREAK/ ENERGIZER** |
| 25’ | **Activity 2**   * + - * In sub-groups (20 min), share in turns stories of conflict. For each situation, try to identify what was the need of each person involved in the conflict. Be curious, open-minded and non-judgemental, to try to dig deeper to understand the real needs behind the behaviours. The manager might not be able to fulfill those needs, or it might not be their role, but it helps understanding better the situation.       * In plenary, share any interesting insights that might have come up in the discussion. |
| 5’ | Closing round  Ask each participant to share in turn:  - one thing that they take from this session  OR  - one question that they still have  OR  - one thing that they will do differently now (even small)  OR  - how do they feel at the end of the session  OR… |

**PEOPLE MANAGEMENT**

*Resource sheet*

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**‘Ladder of Inference’**

The ‘Ladder of Inference’ is a term coined by Chris Argyris (1974), helps us understand how the complexities of how we communicate and how easily they can go wrong! The idea is that our ability to achieve the results we want is eroded by our feelings that:

* Our beliefs are the truth
* The truth is obvious
* Our beliefs are based on true data
* The data we select are the real data

If our beliefs remain untested then we end up making conclusions based on what we infer from what we observe and what we draw from our past experiences. We make assumptions from the meaning we draw from selective data we have collected. In essence, there is what Peter Senge calls (1994) ‘a common mental pathway of increasing abstraction, often leading to misguided beliefs’.

So how does this play out in practice? For example: You are working on a project with a colleague who has information you need. You send her a message by email but she does not reply. You contact her in another way and leave a message but still no response. In the communication ‘gap’ you bring in other data, a difficult conversation you had the last time you spoke. You conclude she is avoiding you and convince yourself your colleague is deliberately seeking to stop you achieving your tasks. Your thoughts build and you conclude she is working against you. On this basis you decide not to help her should she ever need your support. Not resting there, whenever you have any other dealings with your colleague you find yourself selecting only data about your interactions that support your beliefs. You act on this and find yourself putting her down to other colleagues. The next time you see her you avoid her and soon the team notice there is a communication breakdown.

In analysing what has happened we need to start with the indisputable observable data, the unreturned email and voice message. Meaning was added to this data and assumptions were made from which conclusions were drawn. These conclusions then informed the action taken. Rather than challenge the assumptions, more evidence was sought to reinforce the assumptions and the relationship is affected. It becomes a self-reinforcing loop. We end up creating the reality that we experience.

Senge depicts the Ladder of Inference as shown below.

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*The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook by Peter Senge, 1994*

As the Ladder helps us understand how misunderstandings can happen and our role in this, it can also help us avoid miscommunication. Of course, we *have* to add meaning and draw conclusions from what we see, hear and do. It is impossible to function without doing so given the amount of information we face every day. What we can do to improve our communications, however, is to:

* Become more aware of our own thinking and reasoning (reflection)
* Make our thinking and reasoning more visible to others (advocacy)
* Inquire into others' thinking and reasoning (inquiry).

Thinking through the example above, you could remind yourself of the data you observed and check if any other data is available. You could ask her why she has not responded. You could check if your assumptions are realistic by asking her “When you said...” (your inference), “did you mean...?” (your interpretation). In this way, you can use the Ladder of Inference to understand where misunderstandings might have arisen and address them before they damage the relationship further.