

“Avoiding Avoidance” – Reflective Exercises

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Reflective Exercise 1 – Part 1:

Let’s take a moment to examine our leadership culture/ behavior.

- ⇒ **Have you experienced/do you see any elements of:**
 - **Avoidance, Toxic Positivity and/or Wishful Thinking within the group dynamics of your organization and in your leadership?**
- ⇒ **If so, please make note of what you experienced/witnessed within a specific circumstance/situation**

Toxic Positivity – Indicators/Examples:

- a false projection of life as perfect
- a refusal to discuss problems or concerns
- suggestions that people shouldn’t mention or dwell on bad things that happen
- a tendency to blame people for their own circumstances
- difficulty experiencing and expressing emotions
- the belief that pain and distress happen only to those who don’t try hard enough or are somehow flawed
- a habit of turning away from unpleasant thoughts and feelings
- Toxic positivity denies the reality of life’s challenges and pushes the notion that you have total control over your emotions and experiences as the author of your own story.

Wishful Thinking vs. Optimism:

- People relying on **wishful thinking** often interpret a fact or reality according to what they wish or desire it to be.
- Sounds like **optimism**, doesn’t it? The difference is that **positive thinking allows you to recognize facts, adapt, and change behavior for the best results**. You see a challenge, you plan to meet it with a sound strategy, and then you work to achieve results.
- **Wishful thinkers** may ignore facts and give in to delusion. There’s no planning or action, only passively hoping that things will work out for the best.

Reflective Exercise 1 – Part 2:

Practice “Leaning in” - not away:

Let’s revisit the Avoidance events/behaviors you made note of in the earlier Exercise (Part 1).

1. Let’s practice employing **the S.T.O.P. technique**
 - First - revisit how the circumstance/situation you identified unfolded.
 - Notice and make note of the feelings/behaviors/habits that were engaged.
2. How could the situation you identified happen differently in hindsight/retrospect **using S.T.O.P.?**
 - ⇒ Stop
 - ⇒ Take a Breath/Make space
 - ⇒ Observe your emotions/reactions
 - ⇒ Proceed – take a constructive action

Let’s take 3-4 minutes for Reflection/Writing

Exercise #2 - Learning from Conflict: Case Example

Please identify a single impact conflict event OR a recurring point of conflict/disagreement in board meetings or within your system in general.

1. *Identify the “Anatomy” of the conflict; **Cause + Level***
2. *Is this situation a **pattern or not**?*
 1. *If so, why might it be recurring?*
3. *Did you have a **role** in this conflict?*
 1. *If not, who is/was involved and why?*
4. Was there any **toxic positivity** or **wishful thinking** involved?
5. Any other **avoidance strategies/tactics**?
6. What are your **learning opportunities and ongoing challenges** regarding your leadership and/or the board dynamics, based on all the above?

***Time: 10 minutes: 5-6 minutes for reflection/writing. Then Pair sharing; each partner will share for 2 minutes + Group/table discussion. Large group sharing + Q&A**

Common Causes of Conflict:

- ⇒ Personality differences
- ⇒ Misunderstandings
- ⇒ Non-compliance with rules and policies
- ⇒ Communication challenges (ineffective, style etc.)
- ⇒ Competition
- ⇒ Embedded/generational family dynamics and fixed positions/stances
- ⇒ Lack of clarity – roles/responsibilities
- ⇒ Decision-making styles

Systemic Levels of Conflict:

- ⇒ Intrapersonal (within an individual)
- ⇒ Interpersonal (between individuals)
- ⇒ Intragroup (within a group)
- ⇒ Intergroup (between groups – siblings, generations, board committees etc.)
- ⇒ Intraorganizational (within organizations, across the spectrum above)

Exercise #3: Questions for Reflection/Discussion - Leaning into Conflict:

1. What are my individual learning edges around **systemic conflict**?
2. What might I be afraid of when faced with conflict – **Am I avoidant** at times?
 - If so - When/where/why/who?
3. Can I **attune** more to my team/my board/my family?
4. What levels or causes (**the “anatomy”**) of conflict are most challenging for me, as a leader? Why?
5. **What is the impact of any recurring conflict** on the work/the family/the meetings?
6. Do I see opportunities to **facilitate repair** (past/present/future)?
7. Do I see the potential for **my role in repair**?

“ATTUNE”:

An acronym to identify the six basic responses to foster successful repair when conflict arises/has occurred:

- **Awareness of emotions**

- *Turning toward emotions*
- *Tolerance of emotions*
- *Understanding of emotions*
- *Non-defensive listening to emotions*
- *Empathy toward emotions*

The Steps/Guide to Facilitating Repair (Self/Other):

1. Acknowledge the conflict/Name it in the moment. - “This is happening_____”
2. Listen with an Open Stance. (Limit defensiveness, de-escalate)
3. Identify the real needs (the source of the conflict) that lie beneath what was said/done and state those directly. “What went wrong here and why?”
4. Name feelings without directing them at the other – “I’m feeling/noticing _____”
5. Take Responsibility for one’s role/participation in the conflict. - “I can see that my role here is_____”
6. Express appreciation for the other and understanding of the circumstances. “I can see/understand that you_____”
7. Acknowledge what was learned and the opportunity for growth via the conflict. “The growth opportunity here is_____”
8. Opportunity for apology and alternative ways to approach in the future. “Perhaps in the future we can approach this in a different way, do you have suggestions?”

Exercise #4: Engaging our learning: Exercising our Emotional Agility

Let’s take a few minutes and apply our emotional agility and repair tools to the circumstance, in retrospect:

⇒ How could things have gone differently in the conflict circumstance/situation we identified earlier?

1. Was there an **Emotional Hook**?
 - If so, what was it?
2. What **Emotional Data** were you receiving?
3. Now **switch POV’s** for a moment. Take a different vantage point on the situation. How does that inform you?
4. Is there/was there an **opportunity for repair** here? Walk yourself through the stages of repair.
5. What else is there to learn about your **leadership agility**?

Time: 12-15 minutes (6-7 for reflection + 6-7 for discussion in pairs

Emotional Hooks:

Emotional agility can help prevent us from becoming '**hooked**' by an emotion.

Rather than being compelled in negative ways by an emotion (ours or someone else's), we can step back (mindfully) and make decisions with clarity, support inclusivity, enhance collaboration, and strengthen innovation.

Examples of Emotional Data:

- ⇒ **Someone's opposition (anger/frustration/rejection)** to a project timeline may indicate that they are concerned that quality will be compromised, or fear of failure.
- ⇒ **Someone who is feeling detached/exhibiting detachment** may be signaling that their value in the system is unclear - they may not see how they can contribute, grow or develop themselves, the group, or the work itself.
- ⇒ **Someone who is constantly asking for more time (demanding/needy)** from you or from others may be signaling that they are concerned about being confused, lost or unclear or scared/intimidated.

Core Elements of Emotional Agility:

Showing Up:

- Face your thoughts/feelings with curiosity and acceptance. Even though you may be tempted to ignore or **AVOID** the uncomfortable ones, face them anyway, this clears the way for positive change.
- As a leader, try to **listen** to people's concerns without labeling them as a negative person.
- This acknowledges the reality of our emotional range and can help you to focus on positive change more effectively.

Stepping Out:

- Detach from your emotions (for the moment, purposefully).
- This detachment will enable you to feel far more autonomous over your actions and decisions.
- See them for what they are, simply emotions, not who you are.
- In doing so, identify/label them as accurately as possible, this will help you to better understand their causes and what to do about them.

Walking Your Why:

- Use your **core values** (*have you identified them??*) to drive you forward.
- When deciding on what action to take, ask yourself whether this decision reflects your core values and longterm goals.

- For example, if you value fairness, you may choose to have a difficult conversation, ***rather than avoiding it*** because doing so reflects fairness to the individual, yourself, and your team.

Moving On:

- In moving forward, make small, purposeful adjustments to align your mindset, motivation, and habits with your core values.
- Make sure that these tweaks are connected to who you want to be (values aligned) as a leader.
- Don't persevere or get paralyzed – practice moving on and normalizing conflict. This will set an important example.

Exercise #5: Fostering Psychological Safety

1. **How can I/We incorporate and raise the level of psychological safety within our organizations (family) and board?**
2. **What steps do I want/need to take?**
3. **What work will it require in the short, mid, and long term?**
4. **What obstacles or resistance might I encounter in the short, mid, and long term?**
5. **How do I/We need to customize our experience/guidelines to increase Psychological Safety?**
6. **Can I/we see the potential of not only mitigating conflict but maximizing engagement and fulfillment if we incorporate/integrate these principles into our work experience and organizational ethos?**

The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: A Path to Inclusion & Innovation:

- ⇒ **Stage 1** — Inclusion Safety: Inclusion safety satisfies the basic human need to connect and belong. In this stage, you feel safe to be yourself and are accepted for who you are, including your unique attributes and defining characteristics.
- ⇒ **Stage 2** — Learner Safety: Learner safety satisfies the need to learn and grow. In this stage, you feel safe to exchange in the learning process by asking questions, giving, and receiving feedback, experimenting, and making mistakes.
- ⇒ **Stage 3** — Contributor Safety:
 - Contributor safety satisfies the need to make a difference. You feel safe to use your skills and abilities to make a meaningful contribution.
- ⇒ **Stage 4** — Challenger Safety:

- Challenger safety satisfies the need to make things better. You feel safe to speak up and challenge the status quo when you think there's an opportunity to change or improve.

5 Ways to Foster Psychological Safety:

1. Make psychological safety a Priority
2. Facilitate EVERYONE speaking up
3. Establish norms for how failure is handled
4. Create space for new ideas
5. Embrace productive conflict – promote dialogue and debate

Leaders Pave the Way for:

- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Contribution
- ✓ Challenge

= A Safe, Constructive Culture fostering Healthy Engagement

Conflict will always be there, but this provides an environment of trust and cohesion because safety, respect, and repair are in the mix

Recap: Emotional Agility paves the way for Leaders to...

- ⇒ **Lean in** instead of leaning away (Avoiding)
- ⇒ **Respond** instead of React
- ⇒ Foster & Build **Psychological Safety**
- ⇒ Recognize/identify/name **Conflict early**
- ⇒ Identify opportunities/pathways/**potential for Repair**
- ⇒ **Facilitate Repair** if/when/as needed

All the above builds Trust & Group Cohesion

Work the cycle - Rinse/Repeat