

What can get in the way?

...of building healthy and respectful relationships



MEMORIES OF PREVIOUS HURTS



FESTERING PROBLEMS THAT WON'T GO AWAY



FUTILE FIGHTING

MEMORY OF OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

How often do you reflect, as an organisation on your experience of relationships with other organisations? Just as a person may be very wary in a new relationship when they were betrayed in their previous relationship, so an organisation that has had a failed relationship with another organisation will be cautious in a new one.

LEAVING PROBLEMS TO FESTER

In a relationship things can go badly wrong, leaving hurt and broken trust in its wake. Perhaps an expectation was not met during the implementation of a project. If left unresolved, this will in turn fuel further misunderstanding and negative feelings, intensifying the attitudes that people have of each other.

BLAMING THE OTHER PARTY FOR A DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIP

Blaming another person or group is common but futile. It creates distance and defensiveness, and does not help the relationship develop. If you are not happy about a relationship, it is more useful to think about what you need to do, or not to do, to make it better. You can change your behaviour much more easily than you can persuade someone else to change theirs.

OVERLY TASK-FOCUSSED

Just focussing on the task or project deliverables while excluding the feelings and needs of others is not helpful. Often our jobs are dictated to by narrow project timeframes and deliverables, which create a climate where a task-focus enjoys greater emphasis. However, if you ignore people's feelings and drive through the task regardless, you will alienate others and you will not get the contribution you could get if there was a greater sensitivity to their needs. People are not machines; if you treat them with respect and understanding, and listen to their feelings, they will want to give more and work better together.



OBSESSION WITH DELIVERABLES

Some practical tips

MEET PEOPLE AT THE HEADS, HEARTS AND FEET

Bring your whole self to relationships. Express what you think, what you feel and what you want and encourage others to do the same, with genuine curiosity and appreciation for what they say.



MEET PEOPLE INFORMALLY

Most people feel relaxed in informal settings. If you have a real interest in developing your relationship then arrange to meet your partner/s in an environment where they feel comfortable and at home. When people are relaxed they are more able to speak about what is important to them and to be themselves.



IN GROUPS SETTINGS, ENCOURAGE INTEREST IN THE PERSONAL

One of the practices that can be used to facilitate a more open and relaxed environment for working in a group is to ask participants to introduce themselves, and to include what they have left behind at home, office or the field in order to attend the meeting or workshop. This opens up the possibility of sharing some of the feelings that they have. It is not unusual for some to talk about significant issues that are affecting them at that moment, as well as the feelings that go with them. People often also feel relieved when they have been given an opportunity to open up in this way. They feel acknowledged and are better able to put aside some of the frustrations or stresses that might be pulling them away from the work in the group. The group can also feel humanised as they witness a caring environment emerging and as a result the conditions for a good process are established.



IMAGE EXCHANGE

This is a useful technique to use to deal with perceptions and misunderstanding that emerge in a partnership between two organisations.

Write on a flipchart 'How we see ourselves', 'How we see the other group' and 'How we think the other group sees us'. Ask each group to go off and answer these using images and metaphors.

Then meet together in a larger session, show what has been developed and discuss what lies behind it, clearing up misperceptions and tackling problem areas.



BUILDING AGREEMENT

On the left side of a sheet of paper, write down a list of 'things I can do to help you'. Then on the right-hand side, write a list of 'things you could do to help me'. Invite the other person or group to also add to both lists. Then discuss the results and work on the changes.

