

## Conflict from a Creative Perspective



**E**veryone having the same opinions and ideas would be very strange. Two talented people who have nothing in common are more likely to create something exciting than two talented people who think the same way.

Innovation is about bringing together individuals with diverse strengths who can push against each other and build something collaboratively that they never would have come up with on their own. Innovation happens when there is constructive conflict, or

positive tension, within an organization – not total agreement.

The diversity of ideas upon which innovation depends is likely to create conflict as individuals advocate their ideas over those of others. In fact, conflict is essential for innovation because it increases the number of ideas available for potential innovation. It leads to discussion into issues that must be resolved for people to work together and innovate.

The core conflict is simply the tension that exists between what is and what might be. This is the creative tension out of which our

experience arises. When we begin to see conflict as a creative opportunity that is present at all times in all relationships, we dramatically shift our stance toward conflict. Instead of it being something to be feared or avoided, it becomes something to be sought after and embraced.

We cannot pay attention equally to all things all the time. We must focus on those things that are most important. We must look most closely at the places where we can make the biggest difference in our safety and our satisfaction. Though the conflicts are very aggravating, they are also rich opportunities for creativity and transformation.

For every conflict situation, downplaying conflict as much as possible and fostering and facilitating team harmony that contributes to trust, collaboration and creativity are counteracting forces. These situations can be emotionally taxing, but if you have a better understanding of how to work through them and even learn and grow from them, conflicts can actually make you better at your day to day interaction.

According to some experts, conflict is a shark and it is best to avoid it at all costs. But in fact, if you can look at that conflict in a creative way, you will feel that you are swimming in a tank

with sharks. The fear and unease brought on by conflict are understandable; after all, just as some sharks have been known to attack humans, some conflicts have been known to hurt people.

However, the attitude that conflict is often harmful is only a part of the story. This parallel and limiting belief sets us up to miss powerful opportunities to take advantage of the creative force of conflict. To reap the fullest benefits from the conflict, we have to change how we think about it.

Just as sharks help to maintain life balance and health in their marine ecosystems, conflict helps to maintain a creative tension in human system. It invites us to explore new possibilities, combine or rearrange ideas to arrive at wholly surprising solutions or to gain important insights into ourselves and about those with whom we interact.

Innovation or creativity hardly ever comes about when we are feeling satisfied and comfortable with the status quo. They come from the energy created when there is a push, a need or a desire for something to be different or a tension between what is and what could be. Sometimes the being unleashed that we didn't know we had.

Many of the desired changes cannot do alone and need to seek multiple perspectives in order to have meaningful dialogue and broaden the array of ideas. Therefore, we invite divergent ideas, opinions or experiences into the conversation. To make the most of this diversity, we need to learn to become more comfortable and skillful with conflict. We need to learn how to have a creative conflict where people come together, have a spirited and lively discussion and brainstorm sessions.

There are arguments and disagreements, but it feels live and exciting, as if something important was happening and subsequently new conflict might be born.

Creative conflict is recognizable by its spirit of curiosity and mutual respect and its commitment to learning and finding the best solution or direction to take. When conflict is creative, interactions are characterized by questions and by a lot of listening in an attempt to understand the opposite points of view.

Competition in the form of sports, business, etc., all are examples of

constructive conflict. For example, a competition of students to get higher marks has helped other students to innovate and improve their learning. As an example, if you want the window open, and I want it shut, and if we keep phrasing our desires in terms of an open or shut window, then one of us must win, the other lose, or there will be some sort of only partially satisfactory, perhaps childishly, compromise.

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But, if we discover that what you really want is fresh air, and what I am concerned about is avoiding a draft, a creative alternative may be possible. Opening a window or door in an adjoining room

could provide fresh air without a draft. Either open or close, the window debate remains deadlocked, but both fresh air and freedom from the draft can be envisioned. Each person neither wins nor loses, yet both are satisfied. Competitive thought processes and arguments can be transformed from serious handicaps to innovative means to help resolve conflicts.

Consider the inner conflict of depression for a famous painter like Vincent van Gogh, or the role of a devastating break-up that inspires a

career-making album like Alanis Morise's breakthrough *Jagged Little Pill*. Look anywhere and you'll see it. As some other examples, Janet Jackson's *The Velvet Rope* – widely attributed to a battle with anxiety from a failed marriage and a difficult childhood. Rachel Platten's "Fight Song" is also another example of this. She has not become a star within one night. She has had to face a lot of challenges throughout her life. After struggling for so long to the point of feeling broken and lost, Rachel hit rock bottom and wrote "Fight Song" Losing friends and I'm chasing sleep

***Everybody's worried about me  
In too deep  
Say I'm in too deep (in too deep)  
And it's been two years  
I miss my home  
But there's a fire burning in my  
bones  
And I still believe  
This is my fight song  
Take back my life song  
Prove I'm alright song  
My power's turned on  
Starving right now I'll be strong  
I'll play my fight song  
And I don't really care if nobody  
else believes  
Cause I've still got a lot of fight left in  
me***

Art, in its rawest and most moving form, is born of struggle. While creativity is mostly the combination of genuine interest and initiative, the emotion in the art that engages others (the listeners, viewers, customers) comes from somewhere deeper and darker.

Creativity thrives on conflict borne emotion and comfort. But conflict alone will not cut it. You need hope and a vision of something towards which you can channel that dark energy.

Dealing with a difference in a conflict has potential for danger. Looking at conflict in a creative manner we learn to anticipate those dangers, learn the skills and attitudes needed to channel the creative energy of conflict so it works rather than going against us. Knowledgeable and skilled divers can and do swim with sharks without getting hurt.

When you face conflict, it becomes a part of you, for better or for worse, and it can nourish you indefinitely so long as it is not suppressed. Choose to face conflict or choose peace, but don't fool yourself into believing you can have both in full force. Greatness is sparked in dark places. Your struggle is fuel for whatever it is you must make. It is a renewable resource, and only through conflict

do we defy the peace of what already  
is and make progress.