

How to transform the quality of emotional states in workplaces



Our everyday life is a sequence of experiences that we unfold through a script that distributes characters and organizes the meaning of events. This script is a personal frame of reference that reshapes the past, describes the present and projects the future.

A few months after September 11 in the United States, research about stress in organizations pointed out that all the stressors that affect people (including the terrorist threat), the economy was which generated the greatest uncertainty. The unanimous answer noted *"the economy"* in general as the most important factor, but didn't distinguish which particular aspects were the most threatening. The paper concluded that the anxiety caused by uncertainty did not depend on the magnitude of external stressors but depends on the internal ways to identify and address this state of uncertainty.

When new situations overwhelm our frame of reference (our personal script), the anxiety generated by the uncertainty create a cycle of confuse that enhance the perception of risk and cause more stress. As a result, *"the unknown"* landscape becomes a feared context. The sense of threat and fear arises because our framework can not hold new definition and explanations about the situation.

The relationship with the daily facts is a relation

with subjective interpretations and explanations of circumstances. So, it is a relationship with a virtual reality that people create as a kaleidoscope of thoughts, emotions and habits. The landscape we face is a virtual image supported by a neural network of chemical components that define the *"color"* of these daily pictures. The interpretation of facts generates an emotional impact. The experiences are a *"subjective package"* of representations that arise from the articulation of cognitive and emotional dimensions (*"what we think"* and *"what we feel"*).

All living systems, from unicellular to social systems, respond to the context. In a case of people, these reactions depend on the personal experience of events. The experiences articulates two dimensions: one is symbolic, other is chemical. On one hand, conceptual interpretations of events define the symbolic dimension (*"what"*). On the other hand, bodily responses hold the emotions related to these arguments (*"how"*). The following formula describes this relationship.

contents + emotions = experiences

Conceptual interpretation

Bodily response

Subjective representations

Experiences in workplaces

Emotions are automatic responses of the body which stabilize or disappear when the situation is resolved. If emotions are physical processes that are intended to maintain in a short time, why the specific emotional charge is maintained over time? Especially negative factors. What keeps the intensity of anger, fear, anxiety? The thoughts and ideas transform the ephemeral reactions in emotional states that spread like a blanket covering daily experiences. The experiences generate emotional states that define a personal approach to daily events. The difference between emotions (body response) and emotional state (experience consequence) is the permanence over time. The continuity of chemical processes is due to a symbolic dimension (the meaning) that gives a particular shape to everyday experiences.

In the case of organizations, occurs the same phenomenon. We live, work, interact inside our experiences of the organizational landscape. The internal dynamics of the organization determines personal experiences and create emotional states in workplaces.

To redefine corporate experiences is necessary to intervene in the conditions that create the emotional states at workplaces. To change the everyday landscape, we must modify the emotional state that holds it. And, to change the emotional state must change the experience of people in workplaces. How to transform the experience? The redefinition of organizational experiences articulates two objectives. The first objective relates to the clarity of shared content. This point involves clearing contradictions, confusion, and verbiage that influence the interpretation of facts. The second objective includes the quality of relationships. This stage means prevents aggression, discrimination, and manipulation those affect the context of linkages.

CLEAN SHARED CONTENTS

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This objective relates to the clarity and sense of concepts circulating in workplaces to generate a coherent framework of shared ideas. The verbiage is functional to improvisation. The excess of nonsense words causes confusion and suspicion in relationships. Therefore, these concepts and ideas should be clear and straightforward to create a stable frame of reference to organizational context.

To share clear contents, consider three axes of intervention:

A

SYNTHESIZE KEY IDEAS: This point refers to the **GENERATION OF CONTENTS** circulating in the organization that affects the interpretations and explanations that people create about the events. This aspect involves being coherence about the reasons and justifications for organizational decisions (external and internal), clarifying rumors and establishing access to relevant information at different levels of the organization.

B

HOLD THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS: This point is related to the **IMPACT OF CONTENTS** on the emotional state of the people to explain incorrect versions of the events that affect the organization. Hold the exchange involves creating spaces for the dialog to care the quality of meanings, be aware of the interpretations of contents circulating and open spaces for opinion to redefine misconceptions and control its expansion.

C

FRAME THE PERFORMANCE: This point refers to the **CONTEXTUALIZATION OF ROLE** to guide the performance of people. This aspect involves the clarity of individuals about the meaning of their role in the organization and the contribution of individual work to a global goal. Often organizations transmit isolated ideas, which generate confusion, poor performance, and weakening of confidence. To frame the performance is necessary to provide details about the objectives of the work, define personal contribution to global goals, and establish the needs of the organization about these roles.

TAKE CARE THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

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This objective relates to sustaining a favorable context for integration and motivation of people. Emotions define the quality of decisions. For this reason, emotions support the movements and motivation of individuals. The management of emotions for a proper performance is achieved through the quality of interpersonal relationships. To do this is necessary to consider the following axes:

A

REDUCE HOSTILITY AND THREAT: This point requires **CARING PEOPLE FROM ATTACKS**. Body alarms are activated against a context of unexpected shifts and uncertain consequences. The dangerous circumstances enable the neurobiological circuits of fight or flight. Consequently, the body prepares for survival. Cognitive activities weaken and thoughts become automatic, negative and compulsive. Anxiety affects decisions. For that reason, reduce hostility generates a favorable context to think, create and expand decision alternatives.

B

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION AND INTEGRATION: This process **ACTIVATES COOPERATION AND REWARD**. This aspect facilitates performance, dedication to the task and personal commitment. Encourage participation requires creating learning environments that allow integration and collaboration, reinforce positive experiences and enhance communication and empathy.

C

INSPIRE CHALLENGES AND RECOGNIZE PEOPLE: This process **ALLOWS POSITIVE EMOTIONAL STATES AND PERSONAL ENTHUSIASM**. These conditions encourage creativity and the development of ideas, decreases anxiety levels and strengthen resilience facing pressure situations. To activate this circuit is necessary to maintain the levels of significance in the collective goals, encouraging diversity in groups and generate new kind of experiences.

We live inside our frame of experiences. These experiences arise from the combination of content and emotions that create emotional states that color our decisions. Redefining the experience keeps the group (team/organization) in a state of movement and creativity. If the system is too tight, the risk is a stereotyped or compulsive response. If the system is very relaxed, the risk is the lack of appropriate responses. The consequence of indifference is the ineffectiveness. Both extreme states have implications for relationships (the integration of people); performance (results of activities); and its impact on the larger context (in the projection of their actions on other systems).

