

TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

Organization and country: INDEPCIE (Spain)

Name of the activity: LABELS

Overview (What I am going to learn?): How people associate in groups based on common patterns that make us feel comfortable with the people we surround ourselves with because they are similar to us.

Objective (What am I going to learn it for?):

- Recognise what social group I am in, what my environment is and the effects it has.
- Understand what I am doing to be in that group and for others to identify me with it.
- Identify what vision my behaviour and my circle of relationships generate on the outside.

Materials: stickers in three different colours (red, orange, green, if possible)

Time: 20 minutes

Target group: Employees and managers

Instructions for facilitators

This is a dynamic based on the 7-second effect. According to a study by psychologist Amy Cuddy (Harvard Business Review, 2012), people take just seven seconds to make a first impression of someone, the same amount of time it takes for that other person to build up an idea about us. In that short period of time we are able to make a general impression of the individual in up to 11 areas, ranging from sexual orientation to professional success or economic status.

This means that we do not need a broad relationship or extensive knowledge of each other. A first contact, a handshake or a simple exchange of glances is enough to get an idea of what we think the person is like.

This need to generate a first impression in such a short time is due to the fact that our brain needs to be certain about everything it doesn't know, as uncertainty causes it enormous discomfort. In other words, we prefer to have incorrect or incomplete first impressions that provide us with security before going deeper into a more detailed and precise impression because of the discomfort that comes from not knowing everything (apparently) about that person.

The important thing about first impressions is that they not only remain there, but because they give us certainty about what we think the other person is like, from then on our entire relationship with him/her will be based on what we built up in our first meeting.

If this happens on an individual level, it also has an impact on a social and interpersonal level. Thus, the dynamic aims to make us realise how we group ourselves on the basis of social labels, but also on the basis of similarity and a certain law of association by which we feel more comfortable or identified. Generally, sports fans associate with other fans; fans of a style of music associate with each other or computer enthusiasts, to give three examples.

The problem can arise when we are in a group of which we do not feel part, but in which everyone identifies us. So what am I doing to make them believe that I belong to that group? What effect is it having on me? In this way we will also understand the power of relationships, as they can end up conditioning the perception that others have of me and also my results.

Tasks and procedure:

1. Place the participants around you and briefly explain to them the effect of the first impression. Explain that we are going to do an experiment on how this impacts on our group ratings and social relationships.
2. Ask them to close their eyes and place one of the stickers with the three colours we have chosen on their foreheads. Do this arbitrarily, without any prior criteria, making three balanced groups.
3. Ask them to open their eyes and do what we do when we go out into society: interact with each other.

How are we going to do this? By generating a first impression through the colour of the sticker on each other's foreheads. Like this:

- those who have a green sticker will be greeted warmly.
- those with an orange sticker will be greeted politely, but no more than that.
- Those with a red sticker will be avoided, even refused a greeting.

The interesting thing is that this is how we will behave towards others... but we will also have a sticker on our forehead, which we have not chosen and which will be the key to understanding how others relate to us.

4. After a minute at the most the group itself will have realised that they are getting into small groups according to the colour of the sticker. You will ask them to group themselves by colour in three corners of the room.

5. Now it is time to ask questions to different members of each group:

- How do you feel in the group of achievers/neutrals/excluded?
- How do you feel about the other groups?
- Do you feel like you are in a group or belong to a group?
- Are you happy with the group you have been assigned to?
- Why do you think you are in this group?

Conclusion and evaluation:

Finally, we will explain that interpersonal relationships are often built on the basis of biased information and that we run the risk of being labelled based on the group of people around us, even if we are not aware of the impact that these relationships can have (this is reflected in the personal/professional world with the creation of cliques within organisations that cause harm through gossip, comments or criticisms).

Finally, we should point out that there are no such things as toxic people, but rather the relationships that are established between two or more individuals. A person can have a very toxic relationship with one individual, but an enormously nourishing one with another (it is very blunt, but the example of Adolf Hitler with Eva Braun may be significant). So it must be kept in mind that the relationship is a two-way movement, and one in which both parties have a clear responsibility.

In any case, on a personal level, what happens when we do not feel identified with the group in which we are labelled? In this case, the metaphor of a person who is enclosed in a transparent bottle works very well. He or she may have the sensation of having a full view of the outside, but it will always be biased and distorted by the glass. What you can never see from the inside is the label on the bottle, i.e. where it says what is inside, which is what others see from the outside and on the basis of which they relate to us.

References:

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