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Context to the nugget

Jen speaks about our tendency to look at conflict in simplistic and often binary terms. She speaks about a few techniques we could use to understand the various dimensions of the conflict and the interconnections between the various actors involved in the situation. She suggests that we don't fall for the simplistic narrative that bubbles up immediately in front of us.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I think moving on Jen, you talk about the notion of listening and you talk about the importance of understanding the nuances of the conflict situation you are in and you say that when we are in conflict, there is a tendency to get binary in the way we read the situation. Could you talk a little bit more? I found that supremely insightful.

Dr. Jennifer Goldman (JG): Yes. Right. So exactly what you said, when we are stuck in conflict, our attention tends to narrow in focus and this helps us when we are in a really difficult physical situation, right. If you are facing the face of a tiger, you want to either fight or flee and so it can help to really narrow your focus on what is in front of you, the problem that is in front of you and then, you know, almost in a reflex kind of way figure out what you are going to do. The problem is that when we are facing a more modern, less physically threatening situation, conflict is typically much more complex than that. And so a situation that can seem, like it is just about you and me and it is just about what I say and what you say or what you do and what I do, can actually be more complex and so when we do not allow ourselves to notice that complexity surrounding the situation or that is a part of the situation, we lose the opportunity to gain valuable insight about the nuances and about the influencing factors that exist that could actually serve as important levers for change in that situation. So there is a practice that I have used for 10 years that I originally learned from one of my professors, from my advisor, Dr. Peter Coleman who runs the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University in New York. And it is a great practice that people can do even in two minutes. I have seen people have major light bulbs go off and major aha moments from doing this practice. So basically what you do is you start with a blank piece of paper and you can also do this online. In fact, if people want to go to optimaloutcomesbook.com/map, you can find a way to do this online. There is some very cool online mapping software that that we found that is available for free on the website. But you take out a blank piece of paper and the first step is just put down the names of the people who are involved in whatever situation is occurring for you. So that might be, you know, if you and I, Deepak were involved in some kind of situation that was hard for us to deal with, I would put your name and my name down on the map and then I would put circles around each of our names and I would have a line between us to show that we are in relationship with each other. Then I would ask myself to get creative and think about who else is involved in this situation. Well, maybe there is, you know, the person that you report to and the person that I report

to and then there is all the people who report to either each of us and then there is my family of origin and that is your family of origin and they might influence the way that each of us tends to approach problems and our thinking and our ways of dealing with conflict and I would put them on the map. So I start to really get creative and think about what is influencing this situation, what other factors, what other ideas, what is influencing and also influenced by this situation and put that on the map as well. So the next step is to get really even more creative and put on your map anything that would be helping you think about this situation in a different way than you have before. So I have seen people put colors on their map and names of emotions on their map and stars and hearts and to show relationships that are not doing well or that are very loving, anything that can help you view the situation in a different way, put on your map. And then the final step in this practice is you just take a step back and observe your map and ask yourself, what story does this map tell that might be different from the story I was telling myself about the situation before I drew my map. And typically again, there is, you know, insights, often people, for example, a very common insight is oh well, I did not realize that the way this person has been treating me that I have had such trouble with I cannot stand but I feel so micromanaged for example, right, that is like a very common complaint in workplaces, my manager is just micromanaging me and I cannot stand it. I have had someone like literally within two minutes of doing this practice say oh, I just noticed that my manager may be feeling micromanaged by her manager. And that does not take away the pain that I have experienced over the last many months of feeling micromanaged but it does help explain why she may be doing this. And it can give me a little bit of empathy for her in a way that I just was not able to access before.

DJ: Gives perspective I guess to what is going on.

JG: Yes.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Picking up from what Jennifer says, I do think when we are deep into conflict, we end up seeing things in a binary, fight, flight or fright prism and that is possibly due to the several thousand years of evolution. It is worth thinking about how we look at the situation with nuance rather than embracing a simplistic story line. Something similar came up with my conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB), Author of the Book – Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps. She speaks about 5 common traps a lot of us tend to fall into and one of the traps she talks about is the trap of falling for simplistic stories.

JGB: *“Well, so we become, we kind of fall in love with our own conclusions and we fall in love with our own stories without even noticing their stories. You could hear it in our language like your people said, well, it’s obvious that or it’s totally clear that, I hear it in my language all the time and almost never is it actually obvious the thing that I am talking about and so forcing ourselves to listen to when we have a simple story. Like it’s obvious what the government should do here, completely not obvious what any government should do right now, completely not obvious. And so when we hear ourselves interacting with a complex set of ideas as though it were simple, then we know that we are in this trap. And so I think the solution there is to be able to construct a series of alternate stories not to confuse us but in a kind of almost a scenario planning way, not to try and get the right one but to try to help us understand that there are these multiple possibilities, none of them are likely to be a 100 percent right and to help us create a kind of a flexibility of our thinking that will hold us in good stead.”*

DJ: I guess most situations are more nuanced and complex than we think they initially are. Taking the time and creating the space to assimilate the entire context might be helpful in us understanding the plot with all its nuances.

If this is of interest, you might like my conversation with Rich Fernandez, CEO of Search Inside yourself, a Leadership Development company incubated in Google. He speaks about how we all can develop response flexibility rather than reacting to a situation.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [Trap1 - Looking for simple stories](#).

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Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Nuggets

- 73.00 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - The Full Conversation
- 73.01 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Understanding the 4 default conflict habits
- 73.02 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Why some conflict patterns are common
- 73.03 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Listening to understand the nuances
- 73.04 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Engaging our senses

- 73.05 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Reactive and a Proactive pause
- 73.06 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Downsides of too much empathy and collaboration
- 73.07 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Role of ideal and shadow values in conflict
- 73.08 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Real meaning of "take a walk"
- 73.09 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Pattern breaking behaviour and Camp David

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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