

# Inventory of the conflict potential of the workplace: Themes that need skillful management

All workplaces have a conflict potential, i.e. themes where individuals and groups sometimes have desires that get blocked by someone else. The purpose of this worksheet is to gain an overview of the themes that an organization needs to handle in constructive and effective ways.

*Which of the following themes might constitute a certain conflict potential in the workplace? List issues that can be expected to turn up sooner or later.*

## 1. Distribution issues

E.g.: **Money:** priorities in the budget, distribution of budget cuts or deficits, wage negotiations, size of overtime compensation, decisions about expenses for professional training, etc.

**Workload:** distribution of work tasks/customers/patients/pupils/districts, etc.

**Time and attention:** how much time/attention that should be devoted to different tasks and issues

## 2. Positions issues

Particular positions, roles, tasks, placements, etc. that people might wish to get or avoid.

## 3. Structure issues

E.g.: organizational structure, goals/strategic orientation, delegation of authority (who is authorized to make certain decisions?), distribution of responsibilities and roles, regulations, routines, methods.

Please turn over!

#### **4. Behavioral norm issues**

- a) Mutual treatment within the organization, communication styles, attitudes
- b) Ways of performing work tasks

#### **5. Conviction issues**

Deep-rooted and durable differences in views on fundamental values, good/bad, right/wrong, appropriate/inappropriate, allowed/prohibited. Can be linked to convictions, belief systems, value systems, professional identities, etc.

OBS!

When you have listed issues that may have a conflict potential: Review the list and consider whether there are issues that can be regarded as "formless", i.e. where appropriate formats for managing the issues are absent or not working well. Mark the issues where there is an obvious need to develop better management forms.

## Checklist for organizational diagnosis

*Are there, under the respective headings, any incompatible or unfulfilled requirements that may create frictions and conflicts?*

### I. Identity

Are the goals of the organization and its functions in the society clearly articulated, unambiguous and uncontroversial?

Are there any disagreements as to which values and quality criteria should serve as guidance?

Are the staff proud of their organization?

Are there any aspects of the organization that cannot be discussed openly?

### II. Strategy

Are there any unresolved disputes over concrete goals to be attained?

Are there disagreements about which procedures/working methods should be used to attain the goals?

Are there well-functioning methods for coordinating the work of employees, groups and units such that everyone is pursuing, to a reasonable extent, the same goals using the appropriate methods?

### III. Structure

Is the division of responsibility and authority clear and intelligible?

Does the division of labor between different units and individuals work well?

Is the workload reasonable?

Do the staff have access to the resources (e.g., time) and qualifications needed to manage their work well?

### IV. Support systems

Are there well-functioning routines and procedures for dealing with the work assignments and problems that emerge?

Do the staff have access to adequate equipment? Is the physical work environment reasonable?

Do the information channels between different parts of the organization function well?

### V. Reward systems and feedback

Are salary levels and benefits perceived as unfair to the extent that tensions arise between individuals/occupational groups/units, or between employees and management?

Are staff shown recognition for their work efforts?

Are there well-functioning methods for dealing with situations in which individuals fail to live up to reasonable demands regarding their work efforts?

### VI. Relations and culture

What is the collaborative climate, the general atmosphere, like?

How are problems with collaboration and conflicts dealt with?

Do unsound, informal roles exist among staff or between units?

Is there a reasonable degree of tolerance for idiosyncrasies and differences?

### VII. Leadership

Do managers have a reasonable work situation that enables them to exercise their management role?

Do managers have the will and capacity to assume responsibility for management when it comes to psychosocial relations?

Are managers' leadership styles adequate?

Do managers have the necessary qualifications (within their specialty as well as in human relations) to fulfill their managerial role?

Is there acceptance of management among the staff?

### VIII. Employeeeeship

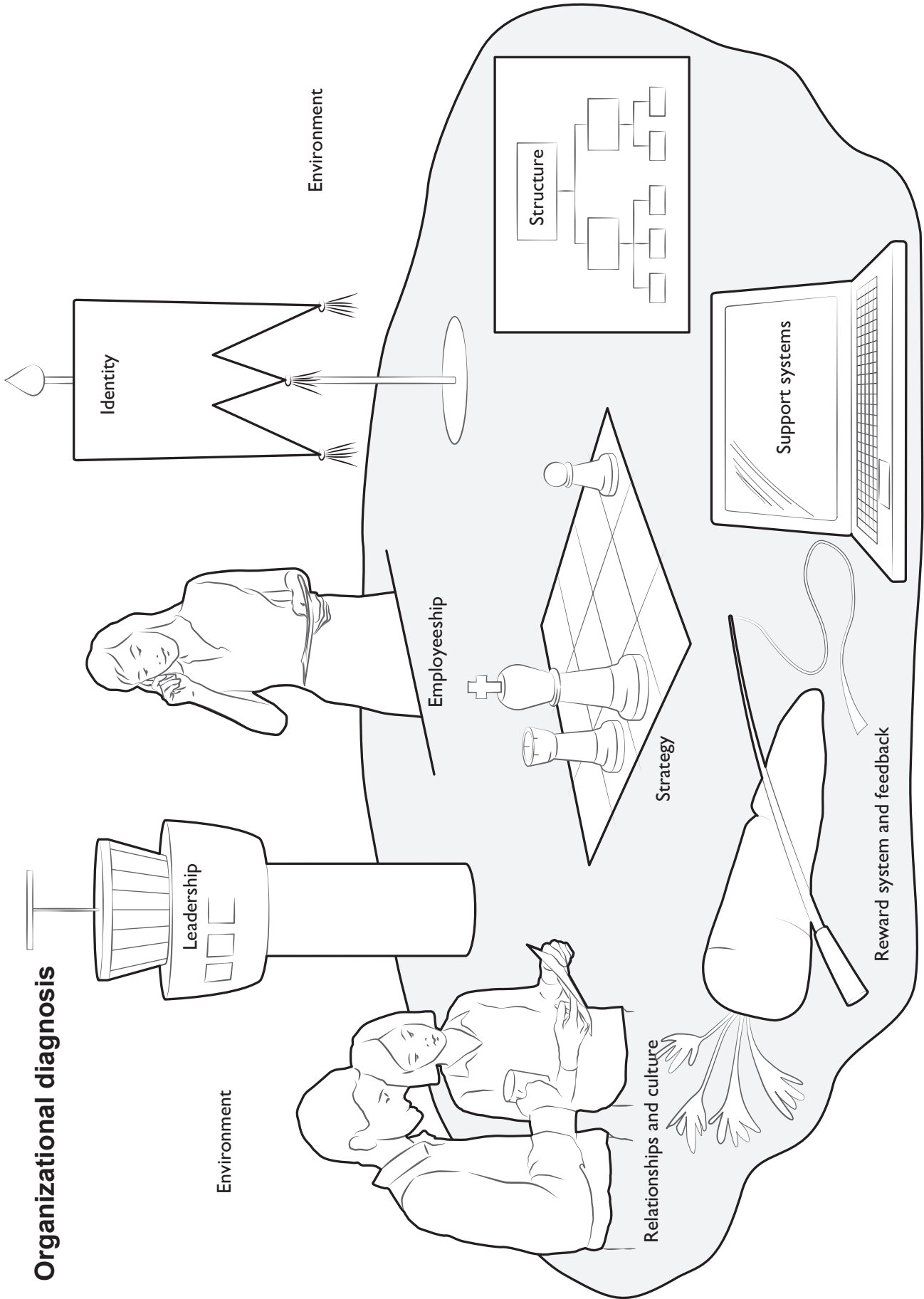
Do employees assume a reasonable degree of responsibility for ensuring that the organization functions well?

Do employees have an adequate understanding of the commitments involved in being employed by the organization?

### IX. Changes in the environment

Are there any important changes taking place in the organization's external environment that may lead to internal disagreements concerning, e.g., the need for sweeping changes in the organization itself?

# Organizational diagnosis



## Does your workplace have a problem-solving collaboration culture?

Circle the alternative that you find most appropriate. Consider what it is typically like at your workplace; disregard exceptional incidents. Comments or qualifications regarding the respective items can be noted on a separate sheet.

### 1. Problem-solving

When collaboration problems or irritations arise, I can count on achieving a good solution by carrying on a constructive dialogue

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 2. Respect

At my workplace, we can trust that our views and wishes will be treated with respect and interest

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 3. Learning

At my workplace there is a desire to perform high-quality work. Disagreements and critical viewpoints are positively regarded, as they can provide ideas for improvement and learning.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 4. Flexibility

We can count on colleagues and managers wanting to be obliging to the extent possible regarding specific desires and needs that may arise as a consequence of individual differences in living conditions and personality.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 5. Equal treatment

At my workplace, we deal with one another as equals independent of which professional group we belong to or which position we occupy.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 6. Ask first

At my workplace, we do not express hasty opinions about one another. If someone says something that appears to be stupid or strange, we first ask about the background of what was stated.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 7. Tolerance

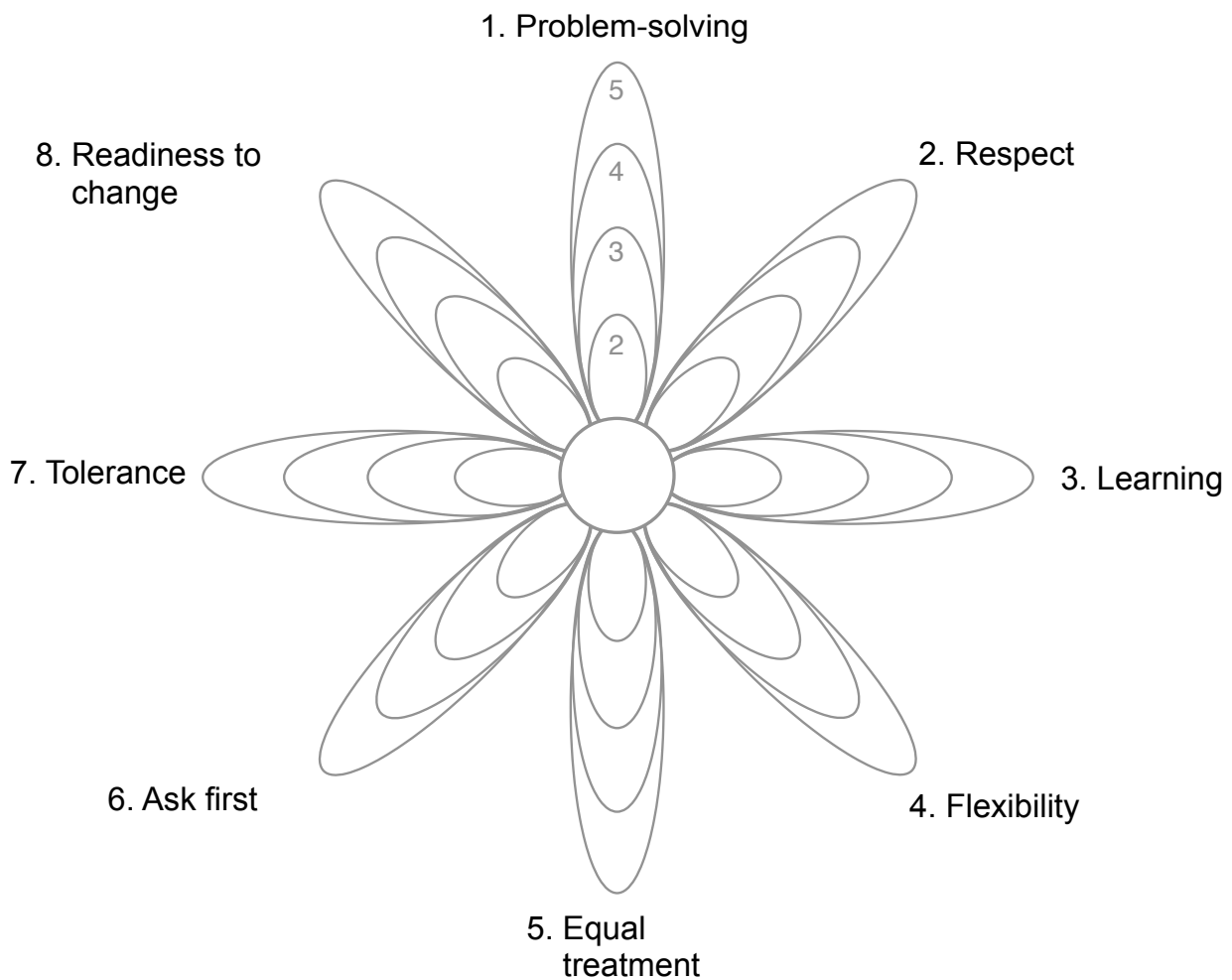
There is a high degree of tolerance for people's occasional mistakes and errors. Thus, you can admit errors and talk about mistakes without running the risk of being branded as incompetent.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

### 8. Readiness to change

Our work is characterized by an eagerness to achieve good quality work that serves the needs of the surrounding world. There is, thus, a positive attitude toward reappraisal and change of working practices and priorities.

Do not agree at all	Slightly agree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>



Transfer the numbers from the worksheet to the flower like this:

- 1:** No petal is coloured.
- 2:** Colour the smallest-sized petal.
- 3:** Colour the two smallest petals.
- 4:** Colour the three smallest petals.
- 5:** Colours all the petal sizes.

## Examples of tools in strategies toward a robust collaborative culture

### A. Forums for early problem-solving

- Coffee breaks and other informal opportunities to meet, talk and solve problems.
- “Open door” policy: managers are responsible for listening to employees’ problems.
- Workplace meetings using methods that invite constructive examination and problem-solving in cases of disagreement and irritation.
- Morning meetings, weekly meetings or the like with summing-up and planning (e.g., summarizing the week’s plusses and minuses).
- Focus meetings: brief, weekly problem-solving meetings.
- Development talks/employee talks.
- Group supervision.
- Coordination meetings for those responsible for various activities.
- “Management by walking around:” The manager walks around, talking to each employee once a week.
- Education of managers using creative meeting methods.
- Let employees take the role of observer at meetings and provide feedback.
- A routine for evaluating meetings.

### B. Employeeeeship

- Methods for regular, individual feedback from superiors and colleagues.
- Well-functioning dialogues with employees to identify and remedy unsatisfactory situations and developmentneeds (possibly including a plan for competence development)
- Clear specification of the commitments and expectations that come with employment.
- Recurring further education in conflict management, communication, personality psychology, leadership, colleagueship, etc.

### C. Leadership

- Access to supervision.
- Programs for continuing education for leaders in conflict studies, constructive communication, problemsolving negotiations and self-knowledge.
- Independent dialogue groups for managers.
- A routine for reviewing managers’ work situation with regard to, e.g., workload.

- Leadership policy describing managers’ responsibility and leadership role with regard to collaborative relations and conflict management (e.g., the “open door principle”).

### D. Culture

- Annual action plan for developing the psychosocial work environment.
- Group-based supervision (e.g., using good workplace meeting methods), team building.
- Common continuing education for employees in colleagueship, conflict studies, problem-solving communication, and self-knowledge.
- Recurring work in working groups on basic values and attitudes.
- Activities promoting good relations and a positive atmosphere among employees.

### E. Organization: Principles, rules, routines

- A routine for recurring review of operations.
- Regulation of roles, responsibility and authority.
- Guidelines and procedures for managing recurring conflicts.
- Written policy concerning values and guidelines for cooperation and dealing with disputes and collaboration difficulties.
- Routine for formulating and firmly establishing goals, identities and strategies, e.g., by involving staff in work with the business/activity plan.
- Plans of action for cases of bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc.

### F. Regulation of exercise of power

- Clear regulation of the authority to make decisions and use sanctions and rewards.
- Methods for raising managers’ level of awareness of existing authorities and possibilities to use sanctions.
- Recurrent education for managers in constructive confrontation and unilateral use of power.

### G. Signaling collaboration difficulties

- Contact persons to draw attention to collaboration difficulties.
- Routines for quickly identifying, solving and learning from recurring frictions.
- Regular reviews of the working environment.

## Strategy for a robust collaboration culture

