

Speak frankly and do not offend

Disagreements are a natural part of a work community and occur in all work communities, regardless of the industry, the management system and the size of the workplace. Wherever there are people together, all sorts of things can and do happen.

We may think that disagreements should be avoided in the workplace. On the contrary: disagreements are useful. They tell us that there is something work-related that we need to revise, specify, clarify, amend or change. They therefore help us develop work and the conduct of the work community.

Work-related disagreements should be settled on time, because situations will not be resolved by avoiding them or not speaking about them. The sooner you address an issue, the less negative baggage it will create. If disagreements are not settled, they will get in the way of smooth work and cooperation. A prolonged disagreement may lead to negative behaviour towards the other person and even harassment or other inappropriate treatment.

Work should be planned and distributed loosely enough throughout the shift or working day so that there is time to discuss work-related matters. It is also important for us to have the willingness and skills to deal with disagreements. Successfully dealing with disagreements boosts our confidence and encourages us to bring up other difficult situations in the future.

Solution-oriented discussion

Professionalism involves the ability to objectively discuss matters that may feel difficult without offending the other party. Another element of professionalism is dealing with work-related matters in the workplace and according to any agreed policies. In principle, the disagreement should ideally be resolved and dealt with

by the parties in question. The video *Once upon a time, there was a work community* by The Centre for Occupational Safety presents one approach that can help with this.

When dealing with disagreements, you should have a solution-oriented discussion and avoid, e.g., putting the blame on anyone. You could proceed as follows:

- Describe the situation or matter that needs to be dealt with. Talk about it in concrete terms.
- Describe how the situation or matter affects you or your work.
- Describe how you hope the situation or matter would change.

Try to find a common solution to the situation. Remember to listen to each other's opinions and ask for clarification, if needed. Speak frankly and do not offend each other – you will learn by doing.

Meaningful work smoothly in a fair work community

It is important to keep in mind that disagreements often stem from unclear work arrangements and not the fact that "that person is being difficult on purpose". Typical incidents involve conflicting or

insufficient instructions, unclear job descriptions, responsibilities or expectations, or unsatisfactory tools or working conditions.

The goal is that we would all have the opportunity to do meaningful work smoothly in a fair work community. We need policies in the workplace to support this goal, and it is crucial that these policies are regularly revised together and practised.

The Centre for Occupational Safety provides coaching on how to deal with disagreements constructively in the workplace as part of its Turvatuokio (Safety Moment) concept. Order a coaching session to be held in your workplace!

Further information

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