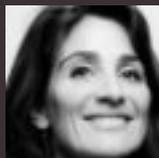


W O R D S

H A V E

P O W E R



**Flora
Bernard**

Can you trust others?

Can I trust my team if they're working from home? Can I empower someone without me losing some of my power? These are some of the questions that managers have been asking me to help them think about recently.

Working from home for the past six months has raised many questions about management, leadership, what it means to be in relation to one another without seeing each other except via digital devices, what it means to feel part of a team. It is the meaning of the words themselves that are being questioned.

What does it mean in practice?

Our concepts have practical implications — although, on a daily basis, we are rarely aware of that. What do I mean by that? What I think about what I do influences what I do and how I do it.

Let's take trust: what I think of trust will directly impact my way of giving it and receiving it from others. It is always a great surprise, at the end of a philosophical workshop, when we take a moment to redefine the meaning of the concept we've been talking about for an hour, to find out that we all have very different definitions, which means

that we have different ways of being trustworthy, resilient, agile or innovative.

Sharing the meaning of words

This is rather reassuring, but problems arise when we don't take the time to share our understanding of the meaning of the words we use and take for granted that others share our worldview. Let's take another example: the way I will cooperate strongly with others depends on whether I think human beings are naturally cooperative or not.

Like Thomas Hobbes, suppose I think that "man is a wolf to man" and that our fundamental motivation in life is to obtain power and keep it. In that case, I certainly won't have the same mindset as someone who thinks that cooperation is a natural phenomenon and that we are all seeking it. A lot of what we do and how we behave has to do with our conception of what it means to be human.

What it means to be human

The period we are experiencing - because everything around us is so uncertain and rapidly changing - is asking us to reconsider our conceptions of what it means to be human (e.g., what is freedom,

consciousness, responsibility?) and, in the context of work, what it means to be a human being at work (what is trust, performance, cooperation?).

Begin by understanding

So, where to begin? If you are prepared for it, I would say that you need to begin by understanding the meaning of words.

*You use them the way illiterates use written signs or the way cattle make use of their senses; in other words, it's possible to use them without fully understanding what they mean. »
Epictetus, Discourses, 2.14*

Not about intellectual curiosity

This is not about intellectual curiosity; it's about thinking about what is most important in life - what makes the meaning of our lives - and living by it. Stoic philosophy teaches us how to take the crises that life brings along and use them to open up our eyes. Instead of thinking we are happy (because we are rich, successful, have beautiful children...), we may realize that happiness is elsewhere before it's too late.

Flora Bernard co-founded the Paris-based philosophy agency, Thae, in 2013. Flora now works to help organisations give meaning to what they do.