



# READ MATTHEWS

TRAINING IN MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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### Edvard Munch's *The Scream* and conflict management in firms

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Edvard Munch's famous painting can be seen many ways. Those who don't know the story may see a person fleeing from something or who has just witnessed a horrible event, among many other interpretations. But the truth is that Munch was sensitive to the human condition and wanted the scream to reflect how some social classes in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century were being excluded from the progress generated by the Industrial Revolution.

In conflict management how you see things also matters - particularly the ability to see beyond the immediate reality. Once we know what *The Scream* is about, we see it and appreciate it differently.

A similar thing happens with certain types of human behaviour. Knowing why people act as they do alters the way we see and judge them. A scream, in our work context, is any verbal or non-verbal behaviour that bothers us or makes us uncomfortable: a client who complains, a colleague who disagrees with us, a criticism, poor results...

What we see is a 'behaviour' - and we label it as such. We also unfairly stick a label on the person: lazy, unmotivated, incompetent, failure. The language that we use is a determining factor in our relationships with others.

Behind every instance of unpleasant behaviour (screams) lie deep-seated reasons and needs. Knowing what they are is crucial if we want to defuse conflict successfully. Only when we are able to gain access to this personal level, to see what's behind the scream, are we in position to deal with conflict better, to handle it correctly, or at least to see more solutions to it.

It's important to remember that we are not reacting to the scream itself (to the painting), but to our interpretation of the scream. We are not reacting to reality itself, but to our interpretation of it.

Proactive people do not get caught up in the external signs of behaviour (screams), but try to see their underlying causes; they are not judgmental, but look to understand. Reactive people, as the name indicates, react emotionally; their emotional response is demotivating both for themselves and others, and results in pessimism, discouragement, low productivity and burn-out.



The **9 Metaphors for Dealing with Conflict** course aims to help us to be more proactive in our daily conflicts and to recognise what lies behind our screams. The *Metaphor of the Scream* is just one of nine interesting metaphors that can put us on the road to personal and professional success.

If you'd like to attend the **9 Metaphors for Dealing with Conflict** Open Course (March 10), more information is available at [www.readmatthews.com/opencourses/oc9metaforas.html](http://www.readmatthews.com/opencourses/oc9metaforas.html)

You'll find an application form there and discover the names of the other eight metaphors.

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