

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

BAG LUNCH FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST – ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

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LISA BRODKEY, DANA HINOJOSA, BINNIE SINGH

# PICTURE THIS

Professor Patel is a senior faculty member in your department who is known to be very focused on her work. She has a huge NIH grant and is prolific in her publication record. Her lab employs several postdocs, five graduate students, and several others. You're in your second year as chair, but you've been her colleague for years. You have witnessed her being snippy and sarcastic in faculty meetings, and you know others consider her "prickly".

Recently, Graduate Studies received an anonymous complaint from someone in Professor Patel's lab alleging that she has a volatile temper, particularly when anyone makes a mistake in her lab. Several of the postdocs in her lab are international scholars, and the reporter says that they are terrified that if they make a mistake, she may fire them. This would threaten their visa status and they are worried they'd have to leave not only her lab, but the country.

# OBJECTIVES

- Increase understanding of different conflict styles and awareness of your default style
- Provide strategies to address issues and minimize potential for escalation
- Review resources for department chairs in managing conflict

# OVERVIEW

- Conflict management in academia
- Styles of conflict
- Case studies
- Resources
- What's missing?

# CONFLICT IN ACADEMIA

What makes conflict in an academic environment different from conflict in other environment?

# CONFLICT IN ACADEMIA

- Faculty autonomy & independence
- Team-oriented decision-making on department issues/changes
- Pre-tenure vs. post-tenure dynamics
- Lengthy faculty careers
- Rotational nature of leadership
- Differing philosophies
- Competition for limited resources within the College or discipline
- Other factors?

Source: Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower: Strategies for Conflict Management in Higher Education by Cynthia Berryman-Fink

# OMBUDS OFFICE

**Confidential**

**Impartial**

**Informal**

**Independent**

# OMBUDS OFFICE

## The Ombuds Office can help you:

- Sort through and untangle problems
- Generate options to effectively address issues
- Weigh risks, rewards, costs, and benefits
- Gain a new, neutral perspective
- Develop effective communication strategies
- Identify possible campus resources and policies

# THOMAS-KILMANN CONFLICT STYLES



# SCENARIOS

For each scenario, consider the following:

How will your default conflict style help or hinder you in addressing the situation?

# SCENARIO

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# SCENARIO

Several faculty members in your department have come to you to raise concerns regarding the Dean's lack of support of the department. Faculty cite examples where the Dean has supported other departments within the college and your department seems to be left out in the cold. The faculty believe that the lack of support from the Dean is undermining the department's efforts to bring in highly rated faculty and elevate the stature of the department. How would you raise this issue with the Dean?

# SCENARIO

One member of your department considers himself a comedian. He often cracks jokes at faculty meetings, and sometimes they really are funny and can lighten the mood. Sometimes they have a bit of an edge and could be considered offensive. If anyone groans or says anything in protest, he usually says something like, “Oh, I’m just kidding. You know I didn’t really mean it.”

# THREE IMPORTANT WORDS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:

**PLAN,  
ACT, and  
DOCUMENT!**

# BE PROACTIVE

- “Living the Principles of Community” eCourse (and facilitated discussion, speakers, etc.)
- Use faculty meetings to set climate and allow for input & feedback
- Foster discussions regarding how, as a department and interpersonally, issues are addressed
- Follow through and follow up consistently
- Model effective behavior and engagement

# PLAN: QUESTIONS TO ASK AND SHARE WITH RESOURCES

- Potential policy violation? Required to notify anyone?
- What harm is caused by this conflict?
- What do I know about the parties?
- Is there prior history? Who would know?
- Who can help determine the best approach?
- Logistics - when, where, and how to intervene?

# PLAN: USE YOUR RESOURCES

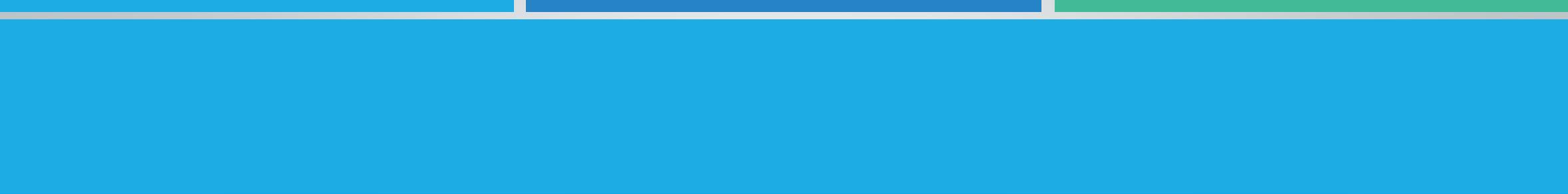
- Your Dean's Office is a great place to start. They may be familiar with the issue and have insights and strategies to address the problem.
- Academic Affairs would be a good next office to consult about these types of issues. We may have more history about the parties involved and can offer ideas on approach.
- Who else???

# PLAN: WHY CONSULT?

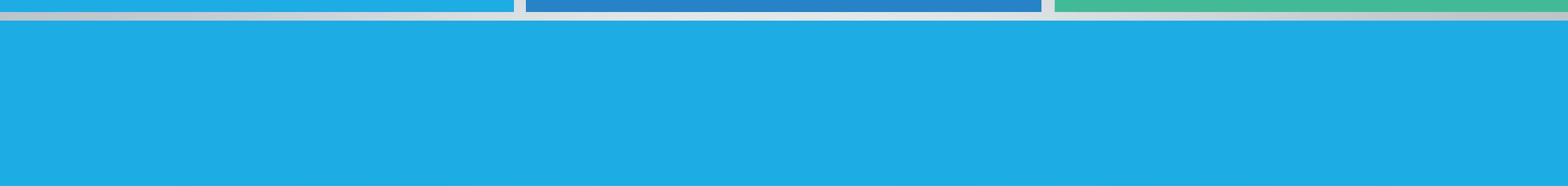
Reasons to consult with campus resources:

- Reduce potential for escalation
- Responding and managing in a manner consistent with the level of issue
- You don't have to be the “expert”
- Extra help
- You may be too close to those involved (colleagues) – need outsider's view
- Large issues, policy implications
- Share the liability

Note: AA works regularly and closely with a number of campus resources



WHEN MUST YOU CONSULT OR  
ELEVATE AN ISSUE?



# RESOURCE LIST

# ACT: THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Intervene early and often!
- Perfection is not the goal
- You know the person/people and can use that knowledge in your decisions about what to do
- If you haven't engaged much with your faculty, managing conflict is a lot harder

# DOCUMENT

- Document for yourself along the way, as needed (note to file)
- When appropriate, document back to the individual(s)
- Don't keep unnecessary documentation in your file
- If this has happened before, documenting may not be enough – may need to elevate (dean, Academic Affairs, etc.)

# THE AFTERMATH

- Confidentiality - need to know
- Ripple effect
- Support services

# LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE...

- You can't control other people's actions, decisions, etc.
- You're close to those involved
- Fight or flight – a body's response to threat (reputational, emotional, not necessarily physical)
- Anxiety is a response to emotion, not an emotion itself

(Are you angry, sad, guilty, apprehensive ...)

# TODAY'S PRESENTERS

- Lisa Brodkey, Director  
Faculty Relations and Development, Office of Academic Affairs  
(530) 752-7643, [labrodkey@ucdavis.edu](mailto:labrodkey@ucdavis.edu)
- Dana Hinojosa, Interim Director  
Ombuds Office  
(530) 752-7233
- Binnie Singh, Assistant Vice Provost  
Office of Academic Affairs  
(530) 752-5726, [binsingh@ucdavis.edu](mailto:binsingh@ucdavis.edu)