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LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify various conflict dynamics and their impact to effectively address situations in a sequential manner

2. Learn and practice specific communication and conflict management strategies to constructively address conflict in your leadership role

3. Understand how and when to utilize ombuds services for navigating complex situations

AGENDA:

Conflict Basics
- What is conflict and conflict competence

Keys For Constructively Managing Conflict
- 3 Step Framework

Application: Scenarios
- Specific communication and conflict management skills and strategies

Final Takeaways

CONFLICT

"Conflict may be defined **as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals.**"

Thakore, D, (2013), Conflict and Conflict Management. Journal of Business and Management, 8(8), 7-16.

Constructive vs. Destructive Conflict

Constructive Conflict	Destructive Conflict
• Occurs when it is safe to honestly disagree • Focuses on problem-solving, not attacking people • Is kept between the parties – not spread to others • Is resolved and strengthens relationships	• Feels unsafe • Is often allowed to fester • Affects others • Divides (people choose sides) • Damages relationships

CONFLICT COMPETENCE

"Conflict competence is the ability to develop and use *cognitive, emotional, and behavioral* skills that **enhance productive outcomes of conflict** while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm. The results of conflict competence include improved quality of relationships, creative solutions, and lasting agreements for addressing challenges and opportunities in the future. As with all competencies, *people can learn ways to improve, change, and develop."*

Runde, C. E., & Flanagan, T. A. (2010). *Developing your conflict competence: A hands-on guide for leaders, managers, facilitators, and teams.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

THE THREE STEP FRAMEWORK

1. Cool Down (Emotional skills)
2. Slow Down (Cognitive skills)
3. Engage Constructively (Behavioral skills)

Davis, M. H., Capobianco, S., & Kraus, L. A. (2004). *Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP)* [Database record]. APA PsycTests. https://doi.org/10.1037/t05628-000

Runde, C. E., & Flanagan, T. A. (2008). *Building conflict competent teams.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

SCENARIO 1

An academic department needs to scale back its strategic initiatives due to budget cuts.

Some faculty strongly support focusing on research, while others advocate for maintaining a commitment to teaching excellence and field education. The chair ultimately must decide which initiatives take precedence. Currently there are disagreements and frustration from faculty whose interests are not prioritized.

Budget constraints are also preventing the hiring of new faculty or even Unit 18 lecturers, resulting in increased teaching loads for existing faculty. This is particularly challenging for those who have previously taught less of the larger foundational classes, because the department has changed the procedures on who teaches those. Specifically, there is now a rotation that includes even senior faculty. Conflicts emerge as faculty members feel teaching assignments are unfairly distributed.

Junior faculty are concerned about the lack of resources for research and professional development due to budget cuts. These cuts are likely to affect their success in future merit and promotion requirements, creating tensions between them and senior faculty who assume they're protected due to their status.

Across the board, the budget constraints are leading to faculty dissatisfaction and an increase in attrition rates. Two long-term faculty left the department last year, taking positions at other institutions. Remaining faculty worry about increased workloads and potential program cuts, lowering morale and affecting departmental culture. This is especially being felt by graduate students who work closely with their program faculty and PIs.

All these stresses erupt in a venting session at the next faculty meeting and, as chair, you are caught off-guard.

SCENARIO 1: TIPS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Cool down: Emotional self-regulation to stay calm, grounded, and open.

Normalize the conflict without dismissing it. Use collaborative language.

Validate multiple perspectives using neutral to proactive words.

Acknowledge limitations without shutting down dialogue. Demonstrate your leadership commitment to the team.

Suggest a path forward.

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

To: Faculty, Department

From: [Chair's Name], Department Chair

Date: [Insert Date]

Subject: Strategic Prioritization and Departmental Support During Budget Constraints

Dear Colleagues,

(Opening: follow-up and intro)

As promised, I am writing as follow-up to our last faculty meeting. Although the topic was challenging, I appreciate everyone's engagement as we prepare to move forward through the next few years.

I want to begin by acknowledging the strain we are all experiencing as we navigate this difficult period of reduced resources and increasing demands. The recent budget cuts …….

(Use sub-headings to focus on summaries of salient points—briefly explain competing interests of each area in an objective manner)

- **Strategic Priorities: Balancing Our Mission**
- **Teaching Loads and Workload Equity**
- **Supporting Junior Faculty**
- **Graduate Student Impacts**

Moving Forward *(Summarize with an encouraging, proactive message of unity and transparency; include next steps)*

My commitment is to lead with transparency, fairness, and collaboration—and to listen, even when our options are limited. We will continue to discuss progress in faculty meetings that will be scheduled on a _____ basis.

This is a time for unity, not division. We each have a role to play in helping the department adapt while preserving our core values. I thank you for your continued dedication and resilience.

Warm regards,

Name, Department Chair

SCENARIO 2

A "star" faculty recruit, Dr. Avery, turns into a challenging faculty member for the department chair, Dr. Perez, to address. Dr. Avery's been ignoring emails even on critical matters and displaying an arrogant attitude towards graduate students and faculty colleagues, often speaking condescendingly about their research areas and contributions. Graduate students supervised by Dr. Avery report feeling neglected and unsupported. They mention his unavailability for mentoring and perceived disinterest in their progress. Other faculty report hearing about the students' dissatisfaction directly, including being asked to allow them to study under them, and not Dr. Avery.

SCENARIO 2: TIPS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Direct, clear communication

Active listening and empathy

Clarify department norms and practices

Address the graduate students' feeling of neglect

Provide constructive feedback

Address attitudes and improve collegiality

Conflict resolution and mediation

Set a follow-up plan

Offer support and resources

Use of formal consequences, if necessary

7-38-55 Communication Rule

- 7% Verbal

- 38% Tone (tone, pitch, pace, volume)

- 55% Body Language (gestures, posture, facial expression, body movement)

Mehrabian, A. (1971). Silent Messages (1st ed.). Wadsworth.

Tips for Tone*:

*Tone is especially critical in Zoom meetings (cameras on)

- Speak slowly and intentionally — avoid sounding defensive or rushed

- Maintain eye contact, assume an open posture, and speak with a confident tone

- Use inclusive language ("we," "our department," "our shared values")

- Avoid promising too much in the moment but commit to follow-up and transparency

TEMPLATE FOR PRIVATE FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSIONS

Preparation

- Gather documentation
- Define objectives
- Anticipate response
- Plan logistics

Opening the Meeting — stay calm, focused, and respectful

- "Thank you for meeting with me. I'd like to have a candid conversation about some concerns and work toward solutions."

State the Issue Clearly

- Specific behavior/problem: _____
- Example(s): _____
- Impact: _____

Invite Their Perspective

- "Can you share your perspective on this?"

Clarify Norms and Practices

- Reinforce standard: _____
- Expected behavior: _____

Outline Required Changes

- Specific actions: _____
- Timeline: _____

Discuss Support (Optional)

- Resources offered: _____

Describe Consequences (If needed)

- "If expectations aren't met, next steps include _____."

Summarize and Confirm

- Recap actions
- Confirm next check-in date: _____

Closing

SCENARIO 3

The Department of XYZ is holding a monthly faculty meeting, which includes both in-person and virtual participants to accommodate diverse schedules and preferences. Dr. Lang, a senior faculty member known for his often-aggressive demeanor, attends the meeting virtually via Zoom.

As the meeting progresses, Dr. Lang becomes increasingly vocal, interrupting others frequently. He overpowers discussions, steering the conversation toward his own agenda, unrelated to the current topic of funding allocations for upcoming department initiatives. He also repeats his opinions and other faculty consistently disagree with his views.

Dr. Thompson, the department chair, observes that Dr. Lang's interruptions are causing frustration among faculty members. Some junior faculty, particularly those who are new and participating virtually, seem hesitant to contribute.

SCENARIO 3: TIPS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Active listening

Set clear ground rules

Intervene tactfully

Encourage inclusivity and support for Junior Faculty

Empathy and emotional intelligence

Use technology effectively

Conflict resolution techniques

Private follow-up

You are the new chair in the Department of Kinesiology, and new to the University. Upon starting your role, you would like to introduce innovative changes to "advance" the department. However, many faculty members are accustomed to the department's longstanding practices and are resistant to change, leading to tension and pushback with you.

Some faculty and staff are skeptical of your capabilities and remain loyal to the previous chair who is still a faculty member in the department. You feel discouraged and undermined in your authority, making it challenging to lead effectively.

Conflicts have long existed between faculty in different series, including Senate vs. non-Senate, and there's a prevailing perception of unfair discrepancies in resource allocation and responsibilities. This is further complicated by a few active union grievances. Furthermore, the department is split on key issues such as curriculum changes and strategic direction, with faculty "camps" forming around different opinions. While the department is striving to become more diverse and inclusive, there are cultural and identity differences among your faculty, leading to misunderstandings, judgment, and miscommunications.

You recognize that you are facing a classic case of organizational change resistance, compounded by internal departmental divides and identity-related challenges. To address these concerns, you've decided to convene an all-day retreat to present your vision, recognizing that tension exists on the above issues.

SCENARIO 4: TIPS FOR RETREAT

Opening remarks: Set the tone

- Goal: Establish humility, transparency, and shared purpose

Establish community engagement rules for psychological safety

- Goal: Set expectations for respectful communication

Address conflict and division (Gently)

- Goal: Acknowledge tension without blame and invite constructive dialogue

Vision sharing: Invitation to co-create

- Goal: Present a vision while inviting input

Small group facilitation prompts

- Goal: Create space for different voices and foster shared understanding
- Example prompts:
    - What do we most value about this department?
    - Where do we see opportunities for growth or improvement?
    - What concerns do we have about the direction we're heading?
    - How can we better support each other across roles or identities?

Name discomfort and encourage participation

- Goal: Invite quieter voices and address hesitations

Closing and next steps

- Goal: Reinforce progress and keep momentum for moving forward

PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

Foundational principles

- Acknowledge the history and emotions

- Build psychological safety

Effective communication and conflict management strategies

- Acknowledge and normalize conflict

- Demonstrate transparent vision sharing

- Use inclusive language and framing

- Address cultural and identity barriers

- Facilitate cross-series dialogue

- Build in shared decision-making

- Demonstrate active listening and empathy throughout

Five Keys to Effective Conflict Management

1. Address conflict early (*Be proactive)*

2. Focus on interests, not personalities

3. Stay neutral, not passive

4. Set clear expectations and boundaries

5. Document and follow up (*Know your resources)*

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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Resources

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