

Conflict Management: Theory and Practice in an Academic Setting

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Agenda

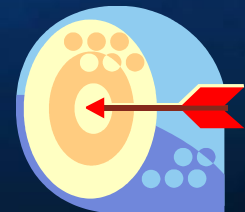
- Introduction/Goals
- Types of Conflict/Approaches
- Steps (Plan, Engage, Resources, Problem Solve, Ensure Document)
- Put Theory into Practice/Scenarios
- Conclusion/Resources

Introductions

- Your name and the type of conflicts you anticipate that you will have to manage as a chair

Goals

- Provide a “step approach” to managing conflict
- Consider what’s unique in an academic setting
- Review of resources and when to use them



Types of Conflict

- Interpersonal, outside of work
- With a colleague
- Managing others in conflict

Effects of unmanaged conflict:

- Affects the workplace and home life
- Affects the caliber of the working/learning environment
- Can trickle into other areas

The importance of this work

- Sets environmental tone
- Builds morale
- Prevents issues from escalating
- Reduces formal complaints and grievances
- Minimizes “infection”, less spreading
- Demonstrates your responsiveness as a chair

Conflict Management Approach

1. Plan
2. Engage (Interact)
3. Resources (Use them)
4. Problem Solve
5. Ensure (through follow-up) and
6. Document

Plan

- Consider the approach (including time, place and manner)
- What do you want to say, what are your goals, specific points to cover
- Consider the outcome you want, and have that ready, but be open to that changing depending on what you hear

Engage

- Instead of avoiding
- Talk/communicate/listen – what does each person want, need
- Dispel misperceptions, gain better understanding
- Communicate next steps, don't leave people in the dark

Engage

- Help the individual consider what he/she wants as a result
- Help him/her generate the main issues/concerns
- Remind him/her to be willing to listen to the other person
- And, to remain open to change

Engage

- Encourage parties to engage with each other
- Let them know your willingness to get involved if needed, “I can talk to ____, but I think s/he would prefer hearing from you directly.”

Problem Solve

- Compromise
- Negotiate
- Look exterior, consider using resources as needed
- Define a course of action
- This is not just venting

Problem Solve

- Help parties consider compromise, giving a little in a balanced way
- Help them navigate and negotiate the conversation
- You can also look exterior, consider using resources as needed to help you help your colleagues
- Help them come to practical, real action steps

Managing Performance

- Important to address concerns and behavior early
 - ✓ Examples: sexual harassment issues, climate issues, etc.
- Determine reporting/consulting obligations (SH)

Follow-Up

- Consider an appropriate time to check in, typically more than once
- If there were action items, did those occur?
- Any collateral effects that should be addressed (for the workgroup/unit), consider confidentiality

Use of Resources

- If you aren't getting anywhere or could use some extra help
- If the problems are bigger than you can handle or have potential repercussions, policy implications
- Spread the "liability"
- You don't have to be the expert, but you should know where to turn

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

DOCUMENTING

Do's:

- Use neutral terms and describe facts (e.g. *“she interrupted me midsentence six times.”* vs *“she was rude”*.)
- Include time, date, who was present and context
- Describe what was communicated, agreed to, next steps
- Cite applicable policies

DOCUMENTING

Don'ts:

- Don't insult or make judgments, e.g., “she was wrong and inappropriate.”
- Don't “sandbag” unrelated events, stick to the issues at hand, unless there is an observed, documented pattern, e.g., if you have counseled this person before, that should be noted.

Scenarios



Scenario #1



One of your faculty members continues to be difficult in his interactions with others. He happens to be senior, he “knows it all”, and thinks less of almost anyone who was hired after him. He’s very outspoken at meetings, often saying things others find offensive. You’re the new chair who was recently appointed and you’re worried about his impact on your junior faculty, in particular. The previous chair didn’t do much about this faculty member.

Scenario #2



You, as Chair are going through recent financial reports and in your review, you find an oddity. You believe there were some funds used for unauthorized purchases. You have a lot of faith in your CAO, and you believe he told you that he had recently reviewed the reports and found no irregularities. He just wanted to let you see it, as an FYI. It turns out the CAO has recently been dealing with a family issue and has been away from the office periodically. What will you do?

Scenario #3

You just learned of a situation in which a new faculty member has become very “chummy” with graduate students. You hear that he’s been socializing with them, perhaps out drinking with them. You rarely see him interacting with his own colleagues. What if anything would you do?



Scenario #4



You have a junior faculty member who is up for a merit action. The junior faculty member has expressed to you individually that she feels confident that the work she is putting forward will easily qualify her for a merit. Other faculty within her area of expertise have raised concerns in the past about her productivity. What if anything would you do?

Points to Remember

- Planning makes a difference
- Dealing with conflict early on, helps reduce liability
- Spread the liability!
- You're not alone! Use your resources.
- Document throughout, even if just for yourself

What do you think?

- Ready to do this?
- Why or why not?
- What else do you need?
- Any questions?