



Conflict Management: Managing Difficult Conversations

Presented by:

Matilda Aidam

Binnie Singh

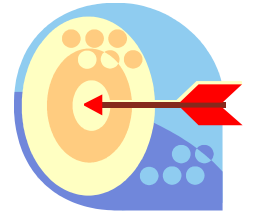
Mandatory Two-Day Workshop for New Chairs

September 15, 2016

Agenda

- UC Davis Ombuds Katherine Greenwood
- Goals and Introductions
- Types of Conflict/Approaches
- Conflict Management Steps
 - Plan
 - Engage
 - Use Resources
 - Problem Solve
 - Document
- Put Theory into Practice/Scenarios
- Conclusion/Resources

Goals



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



Introductions

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

Unique Factors in Academia that Impact Conflict Management

- 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

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

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

Prevention Reminders

- Principles of Community eCourse
- Use Direct Communication (vs. indirect)
- Use faculty meetings to set climate and allow for input & feedback *(Nov. 30 - Chairs bag lunch session)*
- Foster discussions regarding how, as a department and interpersonally, issues are addressed
- Consistent follow through and follow up
- Modeling effective behavior and engagements

Conflict Management Approach

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

Plan

- Determine if policy considerations (mandated reporting, etc.) are in play; important to consult
- 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

Scripting

Purpose

Scripting Benefits

1. Working with experts on crafting an effective discussion template or response
2. Keeps discussion on track
3. Provides a transparent process
4. Promotes consistency with future issues
5. Improves likelihood of a comprehensive response

Engage

- Instead of avoiding as if nothing occurred
- 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/outcome
- Help him/her generate the main issues/concerns
- Remind him/her to be willing to listen to the other person
- Remind him/her to be, or remain, open to change

Engage

- Encourage parties to engage with each other as appropriate, especially very early in a conflict

Under what circumstances would you discourage them from direct engagement 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 and here is how you might do that...”

Intervention Strategies

- Intervene immediately if you observe dysfunctional conflict
 - Public vs. Private interventions
- If necessary buy time
- Gain better understanding of needs/expectations/interests
- Dispel misperceptions
- Interrupt problem interactions
- Leverage your knowledge of the individuals in conflict to facilitate resolution

Problem Solve

- Compromise
- Negotiate
- Look exterior, use resources as needed (before, during and after)
- 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

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

Your Dean's Office is a great place to start – they may be familiar with the issue and have insights/strategies to address the problem.

Use Resources (see Resource List):

- To help deal with conflict early to reduce potential for escalation
- If you aren't getting anywhere or could use the extra help
- If issues are larger than you can handle or have potential repercussions, policy implications, etc.
- To spread the liability by keeping others with a need to know in the loop
- As a place to start; conflict stems from a variety of situations, a resource list helps pinpoint the best place to start, you don't have to be the "expert".

Document

As a new chair, it's important to check in with the outgoing chair for briefing on any pending or ongoing department issues

- 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

The Documenting Process

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

The Documenting Process

Don'ts:

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

Managing Performance

- Important to address concerns and behavior early
 - ✓ Examples: sexual harassment issues, climate issues, etc.
- Determine reporting/consulting obligations (SH)
- Check for history (department records, deans office, academic affairs, etc.), you may be inheriting an ongoing issue

Scenarios



Scenario #1

An Associate Professor (AP) has ongoing issues with a senior faculty colleague whose lab is adjacent to his. AP is considered a “rising star”, having recently received a second large grant. The senior faculty (SF) member is one of the most prominent faculty members in the department. SF often chastises AP’s lab members, sometimes yelling at them to keep it down and often singles out lab members to question them individually about what is happening in the lab and indicating there are other labs doing extraordinary work in field so they don’t have to “settle” for working in AP’s lab. Lab members have reported discomfort with the line of questioning and comments by SF. During department meetings, SF has made negative comments regarding AP’s research, stating, “his research is subpar and that his ideas are really flawed... If I had conducted research in this way, I would’ve never advanced to Full!” AP has spoken to other colleagues regarding how he can address what he believes to be obvious animosity and perhaps some jealousy with mixed results. Some colleagues have indicated that he’s tough but fair, others indicate that he has been this way for a years and is unlikely to change. As the chair, you heard the comments during the faculty meeting and have since heard from others about the lab behaviors and have decided to speak with SF.

Scenario #2

Today, a very promising graduate student, approached you asking if she can talk with you privately. When you meet, she shares that a fairly junior faculty member, for whom she TA's, has been giving her a "hard time". When you ask for specifics, she says, that initially he was just "extra friendly", but lately, seems to be waiting around for her when she's working late, offering to walk her to her car,. He asks her personal questions - about her dating life and what she does in her off time. A few days ago, she found a gift box and card on her office desk. When she opened the card, it read, "Friday night at 6?" with a heart next to his name. She didn't open the package, which appeared to be a jewelry-type box. She immediately took the box and card to his office. He was there alone, and she told him, "I got this and I have to tell you that I'm not interested and I'd like to keep things professional. I hope you understand." She then placed the card and box on his desk and left. He followed her out of the office, saying, "hey, wait. . . you don't know what I meant." She continued walking and he did not continue to follow her.

Since then, she notes his interactions with her have changed, now being very brief with her. He's now told her to "hurry up" with the grading of his exam (when he previously told her she had another week); and that she needs to meet more often with the students, and "step up her game." In class this morning, while she was there as his TA, he said in front of the class, "instead of asking me these questions, just go to her, she'll manage that, that's what she gets paid to do."

Points to Remember

- Setting the climate is key to prevention efforts
- Planning makes a huge difference
- Always consider any policy implications, resources are here to help, you're not alone in managing these issues.
- Dealing with conflict early increases the likelihood of successfully managing the conflict
- Document throughout, even if just for yourself
- A great primer – *Difficult Conversations – How to Discuss What Matters Most*

What do you think?

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



Department Chairs Bag Lunch Session

**Conflict Management
for Department Chairs**

Thursday, January 19, 2017

12:15-2:00pm,

203 Mrak Hall