



Conflict Management: Managing Difficult Conversations

Presented by:

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New Chairs Workshop

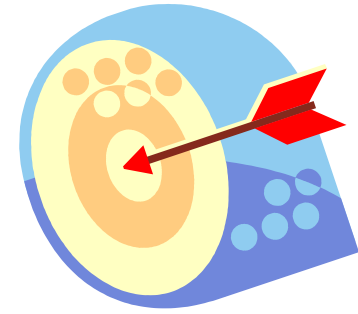
September 20, 2017



Agenda

- Goals and introductions
- Types of conflict/approaches
- Conflict management steps
 - Plan
 - Act
 - Resources (Consult)
 - Document
- Put theory into practice: scenarios

Goals



- Provide a “step approach” to managing conflict
- Recognize what’s unique about conflict management in an academic setting
- Review resources and when to consult
- Increase awareness of your default style of conflict management



Introductions

- Your name and department
- Type of conflicts you anticipate having to manage as a chair



Quick self-assessment

Jot down 3 words you associate with

CONFLICT

Unique factors in academia that impact conflict management

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty autonomy & independence• Team-oriented decision-making on department issues/changes• Pre-tenure vs. post-tenure dynamics• Lengthy faculty careers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

What happens when workplace conflicts aren't managed?

- They can escalate
- People get distracted from work
- Morale suffers
- Physical effects - stress
- Can affect life outside of work
- Formal grievances, lawsuits
- People leave



Why is this work important?

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

An ounce of prevention...

- Principles of Community eCourse
- 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

Five Approaches to Conflict (Thomas-Kilman model)

- Avoiding
- Competing
- Accommodating
- Compromising
- Collaborating

*What's **your** default style?*



Steps to managing conflict

1. Plan

2. Act

3. Resources (consult)

4. Document



Managing conflict is less **HARD**
When you remember **P.A.R.D.**

Plan

Act

Resources

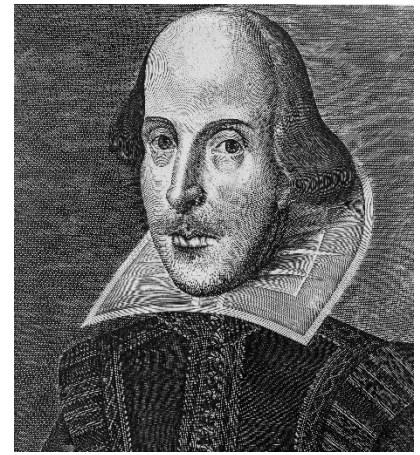
Document

Develop a plan

- Assess whether policy issues are involved (mandated reporting, etc.); important to consult
- Consider your approach (including time, place and manner)
- Identify the specific points to cover
- Consider the outcome you want and have that ready -- but be flexible, depending on what you hear

Develop a script

Work with experts to craft a discussion outline or talking points



- Keeps discussion on track
- Keeps you on track
- Facilitates consistent documentation
- Promotes consistency in your approach to future issues

ACT: When you engage directly

- Fight the temptation to avoid or accommodate
- Communicate (talk **and** listen) – what does each person want and need?
- Dispel misperceptions, clarify what needs clarifying
- Communicate next steps -- don't leave people in the dark

ACT: When you help others 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 ____ would prefer hearing from you directly and here is how you might do that...”

ACT: When you help others engage

- Help each individual consider what they want as a result or outcome
- Help them identify their main issues/concerns
- Remind each to be willing to listen to the other person
- Encourage each to be, or remain, open to change



ACT: Things to consider

- Intervene immediately if you observe dysfunctional conflict
 - Public vs. Private interventions
- If necessary, buy time
- Interrupt problem interactions
- Leverage your knowledge of the individuals in conflict to facilitate resolution
- Would it be helpful to consult? With whom?

RESOURCES: Consulting

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
- As a place to start; you don't have to be the "expert".
- 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 share any liability by keeping others with a need to know in the loop

ACT II: Follow-up

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

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

DOCUMENT: What to DO

- 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

DOCUMENT: What **NOT** to do

- 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.
- Don't undermine your own authority – you are the authority
(e.g., "The Administration is insisting that I write this letter...")

Managing conflict and managing performance

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

Scenarios



Points to Remember

- Setting the climate is key to prevention
- 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*



Looking Ahead

- How ready do you feel to do this?
- What else do you need? How can we help?
- Any questions?



Department Chairs Bag Lunch Session

**Conflict Management
for Department Chairs**

Thursday, February 1, 2018

12:10-1:45 pm

203 Mrak Hall