



DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE: MANAGING CONFLICT

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SESSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand the role Department Chair as *inherently* engaged with interpersonal conflict
- To develop tolerance for managing, versus resolving, conflict
- To identify conflict management best practices
- To strategize around specific cases

CONFLICT: AN OVERVIEW

What is conflict?

- Some difference that results in disagreement
- *Con + fligere*: Latin, “striking together”
- Can be verbal, physical, and/or psychological in expression
- Spans a gamut from differences of opinion on one end, to bullying and mobbing on the other



REASONS FOR CONFLICT

Histories

Political

Professional

Personal

Structural Reasons

Resources

Reorganization

Societal asymmetries (race, gender, age, etc.)

Personal Factors

Different ways of seeing the world

Performance and work ethics

Insecurities

CONFLICT: SOME OBSERVATIONS

Conflict is an unavoidable part of the human condition

Conflict is uncomfortable for most people

Conflict can have negative consequences, especially if not managed:

- Lost productivity

- Compromised health

- Lowered morale

But ... conflict is not necessarily or entirely negative:

- May signal a need for change

- Indicates where the important or interesting issues are located

CONFLICT RESOLUTION VS. MANAGEMENT

Conflict resolution:

Results in the elimination of conflict

Conflict management:

Results in minimizing the negative aspects (and, as possible, increasing the positive aspects) of conflict

Conflicts do not have to be fully resolved

However, conflicts should be managed so that the core business of the department can be conducted in a respectful fashion

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

There is no one “best” style

You can adapt your style to the situation and stakes

Core curriculum revision

versus

Messy faculty office

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICES

1. Genuinely care about the people you work with
Get to know them as whole people beyond work
Build trust: you'll need that in the bank
2. Clarify and articulate expectations and values
Provides a baseline
Helps with accountability
Consider working with leadership to write a civility statement for the institution, your college or department

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICES (CON'T)

3. Know the policies and follow them
 - Conducting research, staff evaluation, harassment, tenure and promotion, etc.
4. Be systematic about how you approach challenging people and situations
 - Define the end game
 - Identify allies
 - Document carefully
 - Identify next steps

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICES (CON'T)

5. Develop effective listening skills

Be mindful, present, and attentive to non-verbal cues

Respect silences, pauses, discomfort, and let the other person(s) talk

Keep an open mind

6. Be willing to re-frame the challenge

What knowledge or skills are you developing?

What deeper issues are surfacing?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICES (CON'T)

7. Get help

Dean

Fellow Chair

Colleague at another institution

Human Resources

General Counsel

Ombudsman

Chief Diversity Officer

BIT Team

ACTIVITY: CASE STUDIES

Focus on the Case Study assigned to your table

Discuss using the four questions on the handout to guide your conversation

1. What is this conflict primarily about?
2. Of the “best practices” we just reviewed, which are particularly important for this scenario?
3. Develop at least three strategies for managing this conflict.
4. What will happen if you don't address this conflict?

NETWORKING LUNCH

Sit at your assigned table

Discussion:

“Seasoned” Chairs (1+ years in the role): what is the most valuable thing you’ve learned on the job?

New Chairs: What’s your most pressing question?