


**COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT
MANAGEMENT FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS** #AItraining



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IMPRESSIONS**

 **LEARNING OUTCOME**

After participating...

...you will be able to use a variety of effective conflict communication strategies to address and resolve conflicts between faculty, students, and staff.

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AGENDA

- Effective conflict communication
- Building rapport
- Increasing faculty morale
- Evaluating conflict
- Resolving conflict

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EFFECTIVE CONFLICT COMMUNICATION

■ COMMON ISSUES, COMPLAINTS, AND CONFLICTS


- Complaints about academic issues (example: grades/financial aid).
- Student and parent complaints (example: courses and advisors).
- Staff complaints about faculty treatment.
- Diminished faculty morale.
- Issues related to tenure, promotion and continuation.
- Conflicts between faculty, students, staff, and administrators.




■ NOT ALL SITUATIONS REQUIRE CONFLICT RESOLUTION


- Many issues and complaints can be addressed through proper channels and with the application of policies, guidelines, or practice (grade complains, advisor complaints, staff complaints, etc.).
- But not addressing conflict (when it is present) will only make the situation worse.
- Often times, a chair is surprised by a new conflict that he/she “didn’t see coming.”
- Other times the chair is aware that a conflict has been building for weeks, months, even years and has been left unaddressed.




 ADDRESS THE CONFLICTS
FOR THE GOOD OF
THE DEPARTMENT

- Regardless of whether the conflicts are new or old, as the department chair it is your job to do your best to address them for the good of the department.
- Gambling that the conflicts “work themselves out” is a losing bet.
- Left unresolved, conflicts can damage the department in many ways and make your job more difficult.
- Unresolved conflicts will often extend past the departmental barriers to the Dean’s, Provost’s, and President’s Offices.

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 POLL

Which of the following types of conflicts have you had to deal with?

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WHY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

Because your communication affects the conflict:

- Communication behavior can create or increase conflict.
- Communication behavior can mirror the conflict that already exists.
- Communication can help you manage conflict productively.

CONTEXT MATTERS


There is no “correct” or “right” communication “formula” to use when dealing with conflict because the context matters in each and every case.

However, we can learn effective strategies that will help us effectively address conflicts regardless of the context.

■

YOUR GOAL MUST BE TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

- In order for these strategies to work, your goal must be to resolve the conflict. If you have a different goal, such as terminating a poor performing staff member, you will need a different set of strategies.
- Using communication strategies to help resolve conflict is an effective approach used by many experienced mediators.




■

FIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THAT YOU CAN EMPLOY

In this section we will address the following communication strategies that will help you address conflicts:

1. Active listening
2. Summarizing
3. Problem solving communication
4. One-on-one session management
5. Facilitation



1: ACTIVE LISTENING



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1a) PAYING ATTENTION



- Not just sitting quietly
- Nodding appropriately
- Maintaining eye contact
- Interrupting when appropriate

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1b) ASKING QUESTIONS

Appropriately asking encouraging questions:

- *"How did you interpret that remark/action/behavior?"*
- *"How did that remark/action/behavior make you feel?"*
- *"Have you had similar experiences in the past with this person/group?"*
- *"What has worked/not worked for you in the past in similar situations?"*
- *"Why do you think he/she said/did that?"*
- *"How would you have handled that if you were him/her?"*



1c) REPEAT IMPORTANT POINTS BACK

Briefly repeating important points back:

- *"So his visit to your office last week was when you first became aware of his interest in teaching the research methods course."*
- *"You attempted to contact her in person on three different occasions before sending her the email."*
- *"You feel that the student's excuse was forged from an old excuse from the same doctor."*
- *"You believe that she is rude because she will not look at you."*



1d) BE PATIENT



- Do not rush them. Often just the act of being able to tell you about their issue will make the situation better from their perspective.
- Do not ask them to “jump to the end,” you may lose important context.
- Do not worry if you run out of time, just say, *“we are out of time but I want to hear more, can you come back later/tomorrow/next week?”*



1e) HEAR THEIR PERSPECTIVE



Work hard to hear them from their perspective:

- You do not have to agree to be empathetic/supportive.
- Set aside your preconceived ideas and embrace their view while you listen.
- Understanding their view may give you the insight you need to address their needs from your position.



2: SUMMARIZE



Summarizing to show that you have heard and understand:

- By correctly summarizing what you have heard, you reinforce the fact that you are listening.
- It helps to show that you understand their perspective.
- Allows you to represent their points in a unbiased way, even if you do not agree.
- Allows you to clarify what you can and cannot do.

3: PROBLEM SOLVING COMMUNICATION



- Put aside all urges to assign blame or point out where they made mistakes.
- Focus on how can you get the parties to an agreed upon resolution or a positive change (in behavior, practices, etc.)?
- How can you get the parties to focus on how things can be better in the future so that they can move forward?

3: PROBLEM SOLVING COMMUNICATION



Focusing on problem solving (not blame or mistakes) can help you enlist the conflict participants help rather than allowing them to remain in entrenched positions.

3: PROBLEM SOLVING COMMUNICATION



The way you communicate can help:

- *"Your perspective on the proposed curriculum change is old-fashioned and you are clinging to it out of stubbornness."* (Focuses on blame)
- *"I can see your points, but can you imagine other options that might work?"* (Engages them in a possible solution)

3: PROBLEM SOLVING COMMUNICATION



- *“Your course is not required so you can not have the new lab at that time!”*
(Leaves them with no options to help)
- *“Is there another time or lab on campus that will meet your needs?”*
(Engages them in a possible solution)

4: 1-on-1 SESSION MANAGEMENT



- Effective conflict resolution requires you to interact with the various participants in one-on-one sessions in order to get each person's story and perspective.
- This time is very important because it allows you to better understand the conflict from multiple perspectives.

4: 1-on-1 SESSION MANAGEMENT



- You must remain calm and encouraging even when the communication becomes very negative.
- You must be able to be assertive enough to keep the discussions on track without damaging the rapport.
- Feel free to take a break, if the conversation is getting too heated.

4: 1-on-1 SESSION MANAGEMENT



- Ending the session without “completing” the session is acceptable. Just schedule another session.
- Summarize important points and assign a task for further follow up. (*“Dan, I have a better sense of your concerns. Please send me a list of your top three with proposed resolutions. Once I receive that, we can schedule a follow up.”*)

5: FACILITATION



- Some conflicts must be managed with both parties in the room.
- After you have the trust of both parties, you must bring them together so that you can facilitate a discussion of the conflict.
- Your job is to keep the conversation positive (or at least neutral) and focused on resolution.
- Using the previous communication strategies within a facilitated meeting can be very helpful.

5: FACILITATION

Do not be afraid to continue difficult discussions.

- End on a high note. If you have a good stopping place, do so with a comment such as *"we have learned a lot today and this is a good place to pause our conversation."*
- Out of time? Schedule another meeting.
- Summarize important points and assign a tasks to all participants as follow up. *"I feel like this has been very productive. As a next step, I need each of you to email me three resolutions that you see as acceptable."*



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MANAGING CONFLICT EXAMPLE:

In a department with only two administrative staff members, the senior administrative staff member habitually comes in late for work and this causes the junior administrative staff member frustration and forces the junior staff member to do a job he is not trained for. The chair is inexperienced and needs the senior staff member to help her accomplish administrative tasks. The junior staff member is angry and wants the chair to punish the senior administrative staff member.



CHAT

Since the junior staff member is angry, you need to talk with him ASAP. Name 1 or 2 strategies you would use in a 1-on-1 session with him.

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BUILDING RAPPORT



BUILDING RAPPORT

- Rapport refers to a condition in which you enjoy an overall positive and supportive relationship with your unit's faculty, staff and students.
- This harmony allows you to be more effective in your work by providing a collegial, collaborative and understanding environment and is also very helpful in resolving conflicts.



BUILDING RAPPORT



Good rapport can help the parties accept a situation/resolution and move forward because you have built trust with them.

BUILDING RAPPORT



Building rapport can help you deliver bad news easier and create a collaborative, collegial environment that can facilitate success.

When you have built rapport:

- You will find others are more willing to forgive your mistakes.
- It will be easier to deliver bad news.
- Folks will join in and help when collaboration is needed.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST



- Make your office a safe place to talk and be wrong.
- Invite input before making decisions.
- Avoid dogmatic positions.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT OF TRUST



- Allow folks to change their minds without feeling defensive.
- Admit when you make a mistake and apologize, if appropriate.

■ LET FOLKS KNOW THAT THEIR THOUGHTS & FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT



- Listen to the feelings as well as the words.
- Note that you understand how they feel.
- Remain calm and encouraging.
- You can disagree and still value their feelings and input.

■ BE IMPARTIAL



- When you deny a request, couch it a neutral way. *"I cannot give you Y, but I am willing to offer you X."*
- Look for the positive view. *"I realize this is not the answer you wanted, but now you have a clearer sense of what is doable."*

BE OPEN TO ALTERNATIVES




- Ask them what alternatives they may see. *"Bob, do you see any ways to make this a win/win?"*
- Remain open to the alternatives and investigate each fairly.
- Remember you can disagree and still be supportive. *"Bob, I appreciate the alternatives but because of X, Y, Z, we cannot take those routes."*




ACTIVITY

MANAGING CONFLICT EXAMPLE:

Two senior tenured faculty members both want to teach a required master's level graduate research methods course. The course is highly prized because it traditionally produces one or two exceptional thesis projects for the professor of record. Both professors feel that you must decide who will teach the course. Their disagreement has escalated to the point that they will not speak to one another.

CHAT

Would you make a decision for one
or the other? Why or why not?

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INCREASE FACULTY MORALE

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FACULTY MORALE

Because of their difficult and stressful responsibilities, faculty can become involved in conflicts with their colleagues, students, departmental staff, and administrators.

Practicing the following communication strategies can help you mediate conflict and increase faculty morale.

AVOID EVALUATING LANGUAGE



Evaluating and judgmental language leads to defensiveness because it feels like you are blaming the other person.

■ AVOID
EVALUATING
LANGUAGE



Instead of saying
*"your perspective is
wrong and you are
stubbornly clinging
to it"* try *"can you
see options that
might work?"*

■ AVOID
EVALUATING
LANGUAGE



- Rather than saying *"You cannot cancel classes."*
- Try descriptive language that focuses objectively on the problem, performance, or work.
- *"I have received two complaints from students this week about class cancellations and would like to hear your side of the story."*

PRACTICE EMPATHY

- Be sensitive to your colleagues' feelings.
- Strive to understand why they are angry, upset, passionate, or depressed about their situation or condition.
- By being empathetic, you create a supportive environment where your colleagues can benefit from expressing themselves and you will benefit by understanding their perspectives.
- Sharing your feelings about similar experiences can help your colleague to feel less isolated.



PRACTICE EMPATHY



Practicing empathy can help you involve colleagues that may feel that they are marginalized or undervalued.



BE A COLLEGIAL SUPERVISOR

- As the chair of your department you are in a supervisory position but your colleagues do not want you to “talk down” to them.
- *“Let me explain my position,”* works better than, *“I am right because I have spoken with the dean and I know what she wants!”*
- *“The department has this new challenge and I need your help in finding a positive solution,”* is better than, *“We have got a problem and all of you must get onboard and do what I say.”*



COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION



Do not make pronouncements from “on high.” This behavior can make your colleagues feel undervalued or unnecessarily place them in an adversarial position.



COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION



- Instead, invite your colleagues to participate in the decision process or offer possible solutions.
- Use an existing committee or ad hoc group to advise you.

COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION



- Remember you can structure advice requests so that they are not binding.
- All committees are advisory....

COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION



React to their thoughts positively even when you disagree. (*"I can see how you feel that way, but can you see her concern?"*)



COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION



- Remind them they are important to the unit.
- *"Your long service to the department gives you unique insight."*
- Being a collegial supervisor builds trust and encourages collaboration.



BUILDING FACULTY MORALE

Support does not always mean agreement

- Support means your colleagues feel valued.
- You can disagree and still be supportive.
- Creating a supportive environment means you make it possible for you to hear and understand your colleagues and for your colleagues to hear and understand you.

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EVALUATING CONFLICT

EVALUATING CONFLICT

- Try the following to help you determine when conflict is present.

LISTEN TO THEIR FEELINGS



- Listen to the feelings as well as the content of the communication.
- Are the feelings more important than the complaint or issue?
- Is the issue simply a symptom of a conflict?
- Conflict may indeed exist if the feelings expressed seem more important than the problem and/or the issue appears to just be a symptom of a larger problem.

DO THEY HAVE TO BE RIGHT?

- If one or more of the participants take a stand that suggests that they have to “be right” while others must “be wrong” then they may really be seeking validation for their actions or wanting you to assign the blame to the other participant.
- The *“I am right, and you need to punish him”* stance suggests a larger conflict is the source of the problem/complaint.

CAN THEY FOCUS ON THE PRESENT/FUTURE



- Can the participants “leave the past behind?”
- Can the participants focus on the here and now or on a better future?
- Or is there “baggage” aggravating the situation?
- A larger conflict may exist if one or more of the participants cannot focus on the present or the future.

WHAT IS THE REASON FOR THE FIGHT?



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- Are the participants fighting for the sake of fighting?
- Will they fight over a variety of matters?
- Do they try to involve others in the fight?
- Do they expect others to take their side?

WHAT IS THE INTENSITY LEVEL AND HOW QUICKLY DOES IT ESCALATE?

- Does the intensity level of the complaint or argument seem to be too high for the specific complaint or problem?
- Does the intensity level escalate rapidly for no apparent reason?
- Does one or more of the participants make their complaint “public” by emailing all the faculty in the department or numerous administrators on campus (e.g. Dean, Provost, President)?
- These are good indicators that there is a larger conflict at the source of the behavior.

■ WHEN YOU KNOW
THERE IS CONFLICT,
YOU NEED TO WORK
TO RESOLVE IT

*Determining what is appropriate for you to
resolve is important.*

- Learn to evaluate conflict so that you can resolve what needs to be resolved.



ACTIVITY

MANAGING CONFLICT EXAMPLE:

Several seniors are angry and threatening to go to the dean; they are unable to take a required course in the Fall semester because there are not enough seats in the course. Your department's budget does not have the funds to add an additional section. And because the course is writing-intensive, you are unable to "overload" it by adding seats.



CHAT

- 1) Is this a conflict?
- 2) How would you handle it?


WHAT NOT TO ADDRESS

*There are conflicts that you should not
address alone as chair.*

DON'T TRY TO
BE SUPER
CHAIR!

You can do more harm than good!

- Leave crimes, regulatory issues, legal matters, etc. to the experts.
- Some conflicts need to move up the administrative ladder.
- When in doubt discuss with your dean.
- Use all resources that are available to you (for example: your institution's ombudsperson).
- Get as much training as possible (the cost of training is less than the cost of a settlement).

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RESOLVING CONFLICT

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RESOLVING CONFLICT

Carefully consider the parties and the relationships to determine your approach.

- One approach does not work for all conflicts, even similar conflicts involve unique individuals and relationships.
- Use the strategies outlined in this presentation to first understand the conflict and then seek an appropriate resolution.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help.
- Do seek more training.

FINAL REMARK ABOUT IMPARTIALITY



- You must remain impartial and fair. You cannot take sides or your ability to resolve the conflict will diminish.
- Be honest with yourself. If this is an situation where you must take sides, then you need to be honest with the parties from the beginning.
- You can say, "I am not willing to do X, but I can offer you Y."



QUESTIONS



TAKEAWAYS

- Communication behavior effects conflict (for better or worse).
- There is no one best way to handle conflict—use your “toolbox” of strategies.
- Take time to evaluate the conflict before trying to resolve it.
- Creating a supportive environment helps.
- Get help and training.



RESOURCE

Communication behavior is important to conflict

William W. Wilmont and Joyce Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict, 8th edition*, McGraw-Hill, 2011, p. 13.



RESOURCE

The skills of a mediator

Nora Doherty and Marcelas Guyler, *The Essential Guide to Workplace mediation and Conflict Resolution: Rebuilding Working Relationships*, Kogan Page Limited, 2012, p. 8.





RESOURCE

Creating a Supportive Climate

William W. Wilmont and Joyce Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 8th edition, McGraw-Hill, 2011, pp. 22-23.



QUESTIONS



EVALUATION

Thank you!

Please remember to complete the event evaluation.
Your comments will help us continually improve the
quality of our programs.

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