

Best Practices for Conflict Management

Responsible Conduct for Research
Brown Bag Series

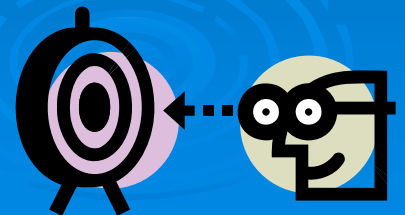
Tuesday – May 6, 2008

Binnie Singh, Matilda Aidam,
and Ed Callahan



Goals for today's session

- **Provide strategies, best practices and resources for approaching conflict situations**
- **Provide some practical suggestions in approaching conflict**
- **Hear from experienced administrators**
- **Apply best practices to case scenarios**



Organizational assistance with conflict



- **Provide advice on responding to low level conflicts**
- **Help make connections to other important campus resources, or have those resources join our conversations.**

When the conflict is serious

- **For more serious cases, we must consider the relevant policy implications**
- **When the matter is at the formal level, we manage the grievance process**
- **Track incidents (both formal and informal)**

Policies v. Resources



- Unless there's an egregious issue (i.e., misuse, sexual harassment, etc.) most issues should be handled as early as possible
- If a situation is too complicated for you to solve, then turn to your resources (Deans office, Academic Personnel, Mediation Services, HR, ASAP, ...)

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN FACED WITH CONFLICT SITUATIONS



Constructive and Destructive Conflict

Constructive Conflict:

- Can increase involvement
- Can clarify issues
- Can improve problem solving
- Can strengthen creativity
- Prevents artificial agreements later broken

Destructive Conflict:

When members perceive the situations as win/lose.

- Includes personal attack
- Diverts energy from the group
- Polarizes individuals
- Creates suspicion and distrust

Conflict Resolution Strategy Appropriate Situations

Ignore the conflict	When the issue is trivial You don't have to die on every hill.
Imposing a solution	Dangerous or critical situations. When very unpopular decisions are needed
Smoothing	When the conflict is not about work and there is not enough time or expertise to deal with
Structure and contain the Interaction	When previous attempts have led to escalation. When a respected third party is available
Bargaining	When the two groups have relatively equal power. When there are several solutions
System redesign	When the main problem is mainly a system thing

Supervisory “Shoulds” That Prevent Leaders from Effective Interacting with Staff/Employees*

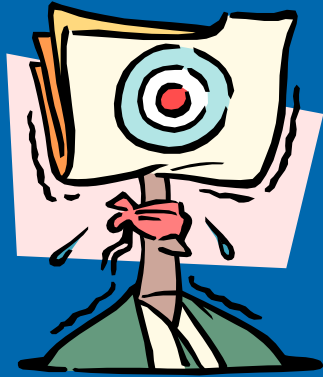
1. I should only have to say it once
2. They should behave the way I do
3. They shouldn't make mistakes
4. They should know how to prioritize work
5. They should naturally have the interpersonal skills
6. They should know what I need
7. They should like and appreciate me
8. They should know I appreciate them
9. They shouldn't challenge me

* from Crowley and Elster

Three Skills for Managers/Supervisors

- Counseling
- Finding Positive Intent
- Stating Consequences

How to Use Positive Intent



Acknowledge the Positive Intent

“Stop It”



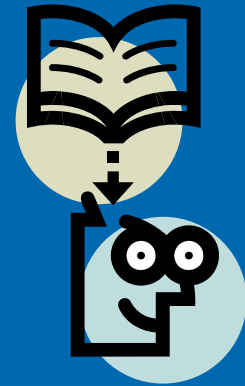
Suggest Alternatives

A paradox of leadership...

We are accepting of the **person**

But...

Not necessarily of the **behavior**



Approaches

For those complaining about someone else, respond with:

1. Have you told them?
2. Would you like me to set up a meeting between the two of you?
3. OK, if you change your mind...

Try to find the Positive Intent in these examples:

- A member of the lab who constantly complains that she can't get the students to follow procedures
- Another lab member who gossips about others
- A post doc, often responsible for managing students, who does not seem to have boundaries with students. You learn that s/he regularly socializes with students.

How would you counsel these individuals?

After the conversation

- Follow-up with documentation – for you and/or between you and the employee noting what was agreed upon
- Monitor and check in about the situation
- If it turns out that this is more serious, consider what other resources you need to call in

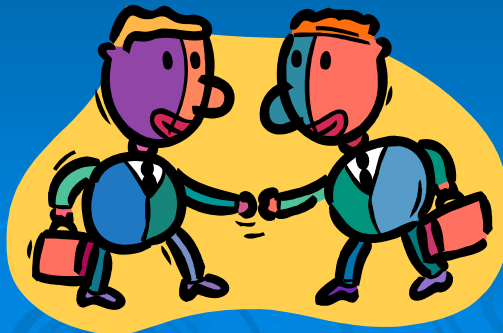
One of those resources may be

MEDIATION SERVICES



MEDIATION

A collaborative problem solving process that assists faculty, graduate students and staff in managing workplace conflict through a structured, facilitated process



Why use mediation?

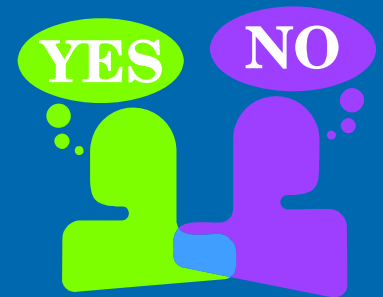
- ◆ **Efficient**
- ◆ **Flexible**
- ◆ **Informal and confidential**
- ◆ **Parties control outcome**
- ◆ **Forward looking**
- ◆ **Minimizes “win/lose”**
- ◆ **Mitigates stress in the workplace**
- ◆ **Cost effective**

Mediation Session

- **Stage I – Define the Problem**
- **Stage II – Understanding via Active Listening**
- **Stage III – Agreements & Implementation Strategies**

Big Six Issues

- **Communication Breakdowns**
- **Recognition/Status**
- **Respect**
- **Absence of Trust**
- **Differing Role Expectations**
- **Differing Styles**



CONFLICT COACHING

- **Work with one party to clarify conflict**
- **Identify potential outcomes desired by party**
- **Examine the impact of conflict on presenting party and others in work environment**
- **Explore methods of addressing conflict with or without the other another person**



Ed Callahan

Associate Dean – School of Medicine



Initiation of Complaint

- Weigh seriousness of complaint
- Hear concerns of complainant, target
 - Two sides will differ
- If potential university violation, involve Dept Chair and perhaps Dean's office early
- Document each step of process in case problem does not resolve
 - Or problem recurs in future

Clarify Definition of Problem

- If sexual harassment alleged, contact the SH officer (at UCD or at UCDCMC) and check to see if faculty member is up to date on training
- Document all communication
 - E-mail better than spoken word
 - Formal letter better if serious complaint
 - Cc someone above you, if serious

Early Face to Face Discussion

- Use judgment about when to refer
- Consult if you are not sure
- Potential policy violations should be referred to Dean's office, who can then consult with AP on best next steps
- Outline warning in letter
 - Specify behavior to change
- Have appropriate person sit in if serious, i.e., Faculty, Dept Chair, MSO, etc.
- Can read letter if very intense

Deliver Clear Warning

- Identify alleged problem behavior
- Define behavior clearly
- Be explicit that behavior must stop if it is occurring
- Hear the employee's refutation
- Include instruction not to continue behavior in letter
- Also include employee's statement/story

Carry Away Materials

- Letter of warning/caution
 - Including employee's refutation
- Copy of policy section allegedly violated
- Copy of Principles of Community when appropriate
- Description of means for appeal
- Warning against retaliation against complainant

Potential Conflict of Roles

- If you do academic merit/promotion review of faculty
 - Must assume innocence
 - Cannot allow allegation to interfere with review
 - Keep processes separate
- Do not prevent investigations regardless:
 - Of academic rank, status, reputation
 - Of grant dollars to faculty
 - Of pre-existing friendship – if bias, let someone else get involved to keep you clean

Recommending Mediation

- When peers cannot work together
- Determine desired outcome of each
- If you are comfortable
 - Ask if they wish to speak with you
- If you are not comfortable
 - Ask if they wish to speak with ASAP or campus Mediation Services

Case Scenarios and Discussion



Scenario #1

You assist the PI in managing a research group. This group has been working hard to complete a series of clinical trials in a very tight timeline. The work has just been completed and a paper is being generated, which is likely to be very well received. Two of your group members express concern about the order of authorship. They have heard that they will be listed last, if at all, and believe they should be higher in the order, since they have done the most work. They've been talking about this to others in the lab and now others are getting "riled up" as well.

How would you handle this matter?

Scenario #2

You have just agreed to collaborate with a colleague, who's new to the graduate group and new to campus. Though you are junior to him, you currently have more extramural funding and some good leads on getting funded for this collaborative project. For the grant, you do most of the work on the application, and submit it as co-PIs. The grant is awarded. Lately, when the two of you have met about getting the work started, you feel that he's taking the lead and starts inserting his ideas as being more valuable, often discounting your contributions. Recently, he's been directing your lab staff on what to do, sometimes countermanding existing directions from you.

How would you handle this matter?

Scenario #3

You are a post doc in a very visible, highly regarded lab. You were recruited to come work here by the PI herself. Having worked in this lab will be an excellent stepping stone in your career, because the PI is very well regarded and has a lot of influence in the field. In some recent experiments, you see the data appears to be “off.” Some of the entries appear to be incorrect. You know this because you were directly overseeing that aspect of the research. This also happens to be a very stressful time in the lab, as the PI has stated to everyone very specifically, “No time for errors. Get the work done and do it quickly.” What do you do?

Scenario #4

You are a research scientist who has recently started your own project, because you've been awarded a substantial grant. Some of your previous work was with a faculty member from another department. The current grant award did use examples from your previous collaborations, and the new research will build from that other work. That other faculty member has learned of this award and feels that you didn't properly credit him in the grant submission process and he should be a co-PI on this project. He claims plagiarism, since he's already published findings from that previous work. Other folks who know of the work, believe you're in the right, but this faculty member is starting to talk to others, bad – mouthing you. How would you handle this matter?