WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- Develop skills in managing conflict
- Understand how your personal conflict style may impact interaction outcomes
- Understand basic communication principles that diffuse hostility and lead to more constructive conflict
- Apply skills to practice case studies
OUTLINE

- Sources of conflict
- Personal conflict styles
- Difficult discussions
- Positions vs. interests
- Communication principles
  - De-escalating techniques
- Difficult group members
Unlike fine wine, conflicts that are left alone rarely improve with age.

~Eric Harvey
CONFLICT IS A FACT OF LIFE

You cannot make everyone happy all the time!

WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OR CAUSES OF CONFLICT?
Sources/Causes of Conflict

- **Diversity**: Differences in perceptions, values, desires, goals
- **Needs**: yours vs. mine
- **Data**: (best source, interpretation)
- **Procedures**: including ways to resolve conflict
- **Power**: especially over others
Sources/Causes of Conflict

- **Role conflicts**
  - Overlaps (parent/friend, student/teacher, supervisor/friend)
  - Changes (from colleague to supervisor)
- **Communication:** loaded words → emotional responses, criticisms taken personally, not feeling listened to or understood (relational levels of meaning)
Conflict is constructive when it...

- Leads to unity
- Differences of opinion can emerge
- Leads to better decision making
- Produces change

“Change is like manure. It stinks but is excellent fertilizer.”
Conflict is destructive when...

- “You and me” moves to involving others
- Self-concern moves to getting even
- A specific issue gives way to general complaints
- One issue becomes many ("kitchen sinking")
5 Styles of handling conflict

Degree to which you attempt to satisfy your concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Interest-based bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unassertive</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>Accommodative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncooperative</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Degree to which you attempt to satisfy other’s concerns
Competitive Style

- Assertive and interested in getting your way
- Less interested in cooperating with others
- Forceful approach

Good style to use if:

- the issue is really important to you and you want to get your way
- you have the authority and need to make a quick or emergency decision
Avoidant Style

- Don’t assert yourself
- Don’t cooperate
- Just step aside

Good style to use if:
- you’re dealing with a difficult person and tensions are high (beware of ambush)
- you’re unsure of what to do
- you have time and temporarily want to wait before deciding
- you are physically in danger
Accommodative Style

- Work cooperatively with the other person
- Don’t assert your own concerns

Good style to use if:

- the outcome is very important to the other person
- you feel you can’t win
- you want to maintain peace and harmony
- you can gain a “bargaining chip”
- you recognize that you are wrong and the other person is right
Collaborative Style

- You get actively involved by asserting what you want
- Still try to cooperate with others
- Takes a little longer because you want to truly consider both sides

Good style to use if:
- parties have different needs; hard to pin down
- you have the time to look at underlying issues
- you want to maintain a good relationship with others
Compromising Style

- Give a little to get a little
- Others do the same
- Search for underlying needs and attempt to work it out

Good style to use if:

- you and the other person want the same thing and only one can have it (both want the same office)
- you have the same power as the other person(s)
- you want to achieve resolution quickly
- collaboration is not working
CONFLICT RESOLUTION OUTCOMES

Difficult Discussions

“Having not said anything the first time, it was somehow even more difficult to broach the subject the second time around.” — Douglas Adams

So Long, And Thanks For All The Fish
Difficult Discussions

- 90% of people and a large number of managers tend to avoid confronting co-workers about inappropriate behaviors.
- Important vs. urgent – if not urgent, easy to put off, then...?
Difficult Discussions

- “The avoidance trap.” What are the risks and rewards?
- Saying/doing nothing validates behavior and encourages more.
- E.G. Performance evaluations
- Beware of “ambushes.”
Afraid of confronting?

- Realize what is happening now isn’t meeting your interests. It’s worth trying something new.
- Plan the discussion, especially your opening – see handout.
- Keep your goal in mind.
Assertiveness Script

- When... (describe situation)
- the effect is... (on you/family/team/company)
- I feel... (emotion)
- I prefer... (thing, action, discussion, etc.)
Exercise

Difficult Discussion Scenarios
POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS

- A position is a stated demand or attitude
  - What you state you want
    - Demand, refusal, complaint, etc.
  - Direct, content level of meaning; attached to ego
**POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS**

- **Interests** are the desires and concerns which are underlying and often silent behind the stated position.
- **Why you want it**
  - Listen for the “wish”
  - “A complaint is usually a wish for something different”
Exercise

Identify Positions vs. Interests
“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”
— George Bernard Shaw
NUMBER ONE PRINCIPLE

Communication is a complex process which is subject to individual perceptions, and thus Ripe for misunderstandings
A message is “bent” on the way from sender to receiver through a process called ‘refraction.’
8 SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATIONS
What I say
What I mean by what I say
What you hear
What you think I mean by what you hear
What you say
What you mean by what you say
What I hear
What I think you mean by what I hear
LISTENING IS KEY

- People listen better if they feel you have understood them.
- If you want others to appreciate your interests, demonstrate you understand theirs (interest-based bargaining).
- Ask open-ended probing questions.
Listening is an active, mental process of interpreting meaning at the relational level

- **Most common mistake:** egocentric listening

- **Focus on the speaker’s thoughts, not your own**
CONTENT VS. RELATIONAL LEVELS OF MEANING

- Each message has both a content and a relational level of meaning
- May be the same, but more often different meanings
CONTENT LEVEL OF MEANING

- Literal, dictionary meaning
- “Gee, it’s cold in here.” → statement about temperature
- “You should…” → well-intentioned advice
Surface level POSITION (what someone says they want; demand, refusal, judgement, etc.)

“I won’t support that new course as required for our majors.”
RELATIONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

- Implied by speaker
  - "Do something to make me warm."
- Potentially interpreted meaning by receiver
  - (re: advice) "So you don’t think I’m smart enough to think of that myself."
RELATIONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

- Underlying, unspoken INTEREST (why someone wants something)
  - “This course is not relevant to contemporary professional needs.” OR “This course does not advance my political agenda for the department.”
- Relational meaning typically reflects status of relationship (power, climate, etc.)
Exercise

Content & Relational Levels of Meaning
De-escalating Techniques

- Acknowledge their feelings (we cannot control feelings, only how we act as a result)
- Paraphrase their message to ensure accurate understanding
- Neutralize hostile language
- Avoid advising (relate to content vs. relational levels of meaning)
De-escalating Techniques

- Avoid asking “why” questions that sound like interrogation – ask “what” questions instead
- Focus on present and future, not past
- Frame statements as perceptions/beliefs, not fact
- Use “and” rather than “but”
USE “I” LANGUAGE, NOT “YOU”

- “You” statements $\rightarrow$ place blame
  - “You didn’t get your work done last night, so I had to do your work and mine too!”

- “I” statements $\rightarrow$ accept responsibility for feelings
  - “I was really upset and stressed when I found I had to do all my work and your work too.”
"I" LANGUAGE

A statement about them they believe untrue or unfair will create anger, but a statement about how you feel is hard to challenge.
“You’re not listening” – or
“You don’t understand” →
Perhaps I have not done a good job of explaining myself. Let me try again.”
Exercise

Reflective Listening:
Paraphrase, acknowledge feelings, neutralize hostile language
How do we deal with difficult group members?
What makes people difficult?
Different Types of Difficult Group Members:

- Those who DOMINATE
- Those who BLOCK PROGRESS
- Those who are IRRESPONSIBLE
- Those who are UNETHICALLY AGGRESSIVE
**Spirals**: each person’s behavior reinforces and intensifies the other’s behavior

- Competitive styles
- Avoiding or accommodating styles
- Competitive and accommodating styles
Negative spirals can quickly get out of control leading to a communication breakdown or worse.
SPIRALS CAN BE POSITIVE!

TALK  GOOD LISTENING

MODEL CONSTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS  COLLABORATIVE CLIMATE