Conflict Resolution Skills for the Clinical Setting: An Overview

Harry Webne-Behrman
UW-Madison Office of Human Resources
HR Communities of Practice Office
608-262-9934
Harry.webnebehrman@wisc.edu
Agenda

- Definitions & Terms
- Important conflicts to address
- Conflict Management Process Overview
- Application: Case Studies in the Clinical Setting
- Synthesis/ Putting it into Practice

Focus Question: “What is conflict, and how is it managed in a clinical setting?”
Recall a time when you worked through a conflictive, challenging issue successfully... or witnessed others doing so:

– What happened?
– How did people feel as a result?
– What did you learn from that experience that you have brought forward with you?
What is Conflict?

• In conflict, the parties perceive a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns
• They perceive finite resources, limited options, and limited solutions
• People respond to the perceived threats, rather than to an “objective” reality
Needs in Negotiation

• Substantive needs = the “stuff” of the conflict...
• Procedural needs = having a fair and well understood process... “Ground Rules”
• Psychological/ Relational needs = trust, honesty, safety, security, integrity
Some things to keep in mind...

- What are some important conflicts that you face in your setting?
- How do they tend to be addressed?
- How is leadership provided to effectively address these situations?
- Barriers/challenges:
  - Personal
  - Interpersonal
  - Structural/systemic challenges
The Key Skills of Conflict Resolution

- Active Listening
- Assertive Communication
- Flexibility in Problem Solving
- Collaborative Negotiation
- Managing Impasse

***For leaders... Facilitating the best expression of these skills...
Three Stages... 8 Steps:

• **Prepare to Engage and Negotiate**
  – Self-Awareness and Care (ongoing)
  – Clarify true concerns of the conflict
  – Have a “safe space” to talk; establish “ground rules”

• **Understand the Issues**
  – “Seek First to Understand” – Hear all Perspectives
  – Assert Clearly and Specifically
    → Identify the ‘true agenda’ for the discussion

• **Work Through the Issues**
  – Problem-solve with Flexibility
  – Navigate Impasse with Respect and Curiosity
  – Build Sustainable Agreements
Step #1: Take Care and Take Stock!

- Understand your strengths, challenges, and styles
- Know your “hot buttons”

→ How might I ‘center’ myself as I approach this conversation?

Leadership Questions: How do we take care of ourselves in our work environment? What resources exist to support a healthy organization?
Step #2: Understand Your Needs
Threatened by the Conflict

- Clarify substantive, procedural, and psychological needs
- Identify desired outcomes from negotiation
- Look at BATNA, WATNA, and MLATNA
  (Best, Worst, and Most Likely Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement)

Leadership Questions: How well do we understand the needs of people engaged in conflicts? What spaces exist to improve that understanding?
Step #3: Identify a Safe Space for Negotiation

- Consider privacy, neutral location
- Utilize third parties (mediators, facilitators, advocates), as appropriate
  – There are times when you may be that 3rd party!
- Establish “ground rules” to support a collaborative negotiation process

*Leadership Questions:* How might we create spaces that support this type of dialogue? Who might be good candidates to serve as 3rd parties to assist the process?
Step #4: Active Listening

Dedicate yourself to fully understanding the other person, and demonstrate that commitment.

Non-verbal messages

- Body Language
- Tone of voice
- Eye contact
- Removing distractions
Active Listening

• Verbal responses:
  – Encouraging
  – Clarifying
  – Restating
  – Reflecting
  – Summarizing
  – Validating

Leadership Question: In what ways do I model ‘active listening’ in order to encourage it in others?
Step #5: Assertive Communication

- Express your needs to the other party
- Identify specific desired outcomes together
- Understand your BATNA, WATNA, and MLATNA (as alternatives)

→ Continue to listen with respect

Leadership Questions: Do I clearly convey what I expect from others? Do I express myself with respect and openness?
Step #6: Problem Solving

• Focus on underlying interests and needs
• Take one issue at a time
• Generate several possible solutions
• Clarify criteria for evaluating options
• Stay flexible! There are solutions out there!

Leadership Questions: How flexibly do we approach challenging issues... are we open to new approaches and innovative solutions?
Step #7: Managing Impasse

• Set aside the issue and “name the impasse”
• Review definition of the problem
• Shift from substantive to procedural needs
• Reiterate “ground rules”
• Look at BATNA...
• Consider a structured break
• Treat the impasse with respect

Leadership Question: Do we treat impasse with respect or try to minimize it or abandon the process? This is one of the core challenges...
Hallmarks of a Good Agreement

• Patiently address all key issues
• Review the agreement for clarity
• Look for “Hallmarks” of a good agreement
  – Fair
  – Balanced
  – Realistic
  – Responds to Needs of the Conflict
  – Specific Enough
  – As self-enforcing as possible
  – Future-oriented

Leadership Question: Can we support group members to work through the tough issues that get us bogged down?
Implement and Evaluate

• Do all you can to implement the Agreement
• Arrange a time to meet together and review the Agreement:
  – Did we follow through with the agreement?
  – Is it working? How can it be improved?
  – Are there any additional areas of concern?
Practice!
For additional information...

• Contact Harry at UW-OHR, 262-9934 or harry.wiebnebehrman@wisc.edu

• Visit the Conflict Resolution Skills Site: http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/onlinetraining/resolution/index.htm