MENDING THE CRACKS
in the
IVORY TOWER

Strategies for Conflict Management
in Higher Education

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

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Deans and department chairs can use their colleagues in student affairs to educate faculty about the law. Many conflicts that occur regarding these laws could be cut short with good information that is widely distributed, thoroughly discussed, and sensibly interpreted.

SUMMARY

Conflict in higher education often crosses the boundaries for decision-making that are established by job descriptions and organizational charts. Our students are well served by curricular decisions that are made in academic affairs and cocurricular decisions that are made in student affairs. But the examples in this chapter illustrate areas where the boundaries of the organization can detract from the quality of decisions that are made about students and their lives. By sharing information and perspectives across the reporting lines of academic affairs and student affairs, we can assist each other and improve the quality of the educational experience for our students.

On many of our campuses, the descendants of Mr. Chips are alive and well and contributing endless hours to the education of students. Also, on many campuses, those descendants are joined by student affairs staff who are engaged in teaching life skills to students, managing group activities as learning experiences, and interpreting the laws that affect our campus operations. The communication between these two groups can only make us each more effective in our primary roles and of greater benefit and service to the population that is most important to us all . . . our students.

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10 Cynthia Berryman-Fink

CAN WE AGREE TO DISAGREE? FACULTY-FACULTY CONFLICT

You are the department chair of basic studies at Anywhere University. Professor Yee just informed you that Professor Borden is making disparaging remarks to students about Yee's teaching style and is advising students not to enroll in Yee's courses. Professor Yee demands that you get Professor Borden to stop this behavior or he will file a grievance against Borden and the department. Yesterday, the head of the curriculum committee in your department informed you that the intractable divisions between the research-oriented and the teaching-oriented faculty have brought the work of the committee to a halt. You are expected to solve the problem. Your secretary reminds you of the afternoon meeting you have with a junior faculty member who has serious complaints about biases among some faculty on the tenure committee who have voted against her tenure.

Could this be a description of your administrative responsibilities? For many department chairs, faculty conflicts seem to take ever-increasing amounts of administrative time and energy. A similar scenario of faculty conflict problems could be presented for deans. Managing faculty conflicts is one of the least pleasant aspects of an administrator's job, yet it is a role they cannot avoid. Chairs and deans must be skilled in handling faculty

conflicts and can use many strategies and resources for effective conflict management.

This chapter examines the unique nature of the academic culture and the changes in higher education which fuel faculty conflict. It discusses the general nature of interpersonal conflict and the dangers of avoiding the conflict management role. Finally, it presents six strategies for managing faculty conflict, each with a mini-case study to show the application of these conflict-management techniques.

While interpersonal conflict is an inevitable part of any group or workplace organization, the unique culture of academic institutions makes conflict a particularly prevalent part of higher educational institutions (Bergquist, 1992). Since culture helps to define the nature of reality and of relationships for those who are a part of the culture, it is important that we examine how typical academic cultures shape interpersonal interaction. Let us look at some of the features of university life which can fuel faculty-faculty conflict.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE ACADEMIC CULTURE

First, it is important to emphasize that colleges and universities operate on the principle of democratic decision-making. Virtually all decisions are based, in principle, upon collective thinking and widespread faculty input. Unlike the private sector which may solicit employee input or use team-based approaches to change, higher education follows the principle of shared governance, where administrators and faculty have equal input into the formulation of policy, procedures, and operating decisions. While not all university decisions actually occur through democratic decision-making, the ideal of shared governance permeates academic thinking. Whicker & Kronenfeld (1994) describe universities as peer-regulated, like legislatures, where the potential for conflict is rampant.

Secondly, faculty probably have more autonomy in doing their jobs than do many other types of employees. Indeed, many faculty resist even considering themselves as employees. Most faculty have some degree of control over what they teach, how they teach it, and when they teach it. They can decide what programs of research to pursue and what internal committees on which to serve. Faculty, for the most part, shape the direction of their careers and control their daily work schedules. When giving advice to deans and provosts on managing academic enterprises, Ehrle and Bennett (1988) describe faculty as independent-minded people who view themselves mostly in individualistic terms. This sense of independence can fuel and complicate

conflict in the academy. Imagine two faculty members, each with a strong sense of self-control and autonomy, who need to arrive at a joint decision. Should their viewpoints differ, the possibility for forcing one's position and resisting another's position is great.

Next, add to this culture the notion of job security and longevity within an institution. Educational institutions are one of the few workplace environments which grant an employee a job for life. The tenure system can exacerbate faculty-faculty conflict in at least two ways. A tenured faculty member can resist organizational goals or refuse to cooperate with colleagues, and few organizational sanctions can be used to change that person's behavior. Performance reviews tied to real job consequences or possible termination provide little incentive in academe for faculty to work cooperatively. Also, upon receiving tenure, faculty are unlikely to seek positions elsewhere and thereby lose tenure. Thus, in many colleges and universities, faculty longevity places the same people working in the same department for decades. Personality conflicts, personal feuds, and group factions can exist for a lifetime.

A fourth feature of the academic culture relevant to conflict between faculty members is the value placed on free thought. Open discussion, free thought, and critical thinking as hallmarks of the academy are precursors to conflict (Holton, 1995). Faculty openly engage in debate, are trained to be adamantly and vocally critical of ideas, and value the clash of positions as an intellectual endeavor. It is not uncommon, then, for two or more faculty to forcefully pursue opposing arguments and refuse to compromise on intellectual or philosophical grounds. It is easy for faculty who debate different schools of thought about a subject matter to debate each other on everything else.

Another factor in higher education is the common isolation and competition among departments. Faculty members in departments of biology, English, or history may reside in the same academic division or college, but they will define their identity through their disciplinary departments and not their college affiliation. In departments such as electrical engineering, nursing, or special education which cross colleges, faculty may have even less in common. Departments within and across colleges often find themselves in competition for resources. Thus, instead of a spirit of teamwork or collaboration among faculty, there is often the protection of individual turf, antagonism, and competition among departmentally based faculty.

A sixth element fueling conflict in academe relates to the nature of faculty roles and performance expectations. In many institutions, faculty perform multiple roles. They teach, advise students, revise curriculum, do

research, publish books and articles, and serve on university governance committees. They may seek external research or training grants, serve as speakers, trainers, or consultants to community organizations, act as leaders in professional organizations, run student internship programs, and advise student organizations. Such a diversity of roles can lead to conflict between faculty about the priorities of tasks. A teaching-oriented faculty member may find himself in conflict with a research-oriented faculty member when they must work together to formulate department goals or policy. Likewise, there can be much internal conflict about balancing roles, establishing priorities, and meshing individual goals with departmental goals.

Finally, unlike the situation in private companies, faculty often rotate through management and nonmanagement jobs. A faculty member may serve a term as department chair and then return to the faculty while another colleague becomes the department head. So the administrator can have as subordinates individuals who previously were his superiors. For example, in one academic department, the current department head has two former department chairs, a former vice provost, and her newly elected successor as members of the faculty. Imagine the possible power dynamics and the potential for interpersonal conflict! The ever-changing authority relationships clearly can create tension fueling conflict in institutions of higher education.

So we see that shared governance, faculty independence, employment longevity, the predisposition toward critical thinking, interdepartmental competition, multiple role expectations, and changing authority relationships can contribute to conflict among faculty.

When eccentric behavior, hidden agendas, and individual suspicions are added to the mix (Ehrle & Bennett, 1988), we can see that the academic culture is conflict-prone. This is not to imply that the cultural elements of the educational workplace always lead to conflict among faculty. Certainly, all of these features can have positive outcomes for the individual, the organization, and those served by academe. But taken collectively, the features of an academic culture make interpersonal conflict inevitable.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education has recently been presented with a number of changes and challenges which are sources of stress and disagreement among faculty. Kennedy (1995) describes a revolution in higher education, with great changes on the horizon, despite academe's tendency to resist change. By examining the various changes facing higher education, we can see additional sources of conflict among faculty.

Anyone working in a college or university is aware of the widespread budget reductions of the last decade. The pressures of financial constraint and continually diminishing resources have significantly hindered faculty morale and caused increased competition among faculty and departments. Where there may not have been as much conflict before, faculty now compete with each other for permanent positions, tenure, merit raises, students, classrooms, equipment, and supplies. Inevitably, when resources are scarce, those wanting the resources will find themselves in conflict.

Another change which has taken many faculty by surprise is the increased accountability regarding faculty workload. Previously, faculty did not have to document how many hours they worked per week or explain why they put their efforts into some activities rather than into others. Because of financial constraints, public scrutiny, and government intervention, faculty increasingly have to work harder and must justify their productivity. In such a climate, tensions run high and individuals are prone to protect themselves by criticizing others. Conflicts arise over who is and is not carrying their weight and how the work of a department will get done.

A third element in the higher education revolution is the perceived or actual threat to tenure and job security. Because of financial pressures, academic programs are being reviewed in record numbers, and some programs and faculty positions are being abolished. Some colleges and universities have instituted or begun discussing procedures for post-tenure review. So where tenure once provided absolute job security for faculty, the situation is more tenuous today. Faculty, worried about their jobs and disgruntled about the loss of public esteem previously accorded to the professoriate, will inevitably become cranky, contentious, and prone to conflict.

Jandt and Kaufman (1992) assert that another change is the evolution in academe from a community of scholars to a bureaucracy in which faculty must deal with increasing amounts of red tape and inflexibility. Such bureaucracy is altering the relationships between faculty and between faculty and their chairs. Conflicts may arise out of policy inflexibility, become escalated quickly, and lead to a reliance on formal mechanisms for handling conflict. They cite the influence of unionization and collective bargaining agreements on interpersonal relationships and conflict behavior in academe. The increase in litigation and fear of litigation in academe additionally creates a changing environment with implications for faculty-faculty conflict.

Other elements of change facing faculty include changing demographics of the student population and student preparedness, shifting values regarding research and scholarship, renewed attention to teaching effectiveness,

and increasing involvement of higher education in the economy (Ehrle & Bennett, 1988; Fairweather, 1996). Many institutions serve a broader range of students than in the past, including nontraditionally aged students, part-time students, ethnic students, international students, and students with physical and learning disabilities. Such diversity can present challenges and stresses to faculty. Many faculty lament that students increasingly lack basic skills of reading, writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and library literacy, making the college faculty member's task more difficult. Faculty increasingly find themselves uncertain about their institution's mission related to their own career direction. Undergraduate institutions may be expecting more of an emphasis on research in addition to the teaching role. In some cases, the publish or perish concept is affecting even community college faculty. Concurrently, research universities are experiencing less funding opportunities and heightened expectations for teaching. And virtu-ally all institutions of higher education demand innovations and excellence in teaching. Many state legislatures are expecting public institutions to embrace roles in advancing the state's economy.

Because of immense changes in higher education, faculty have lost the predictability about their jobs they once had. With a loss of predictability comes uncertainty, stress, and the potential for interpersonal conflict. It is imperative, then, that department chairs and deans be competent in conflict management. They must understand the general nature of conflict in the academy, identify their roles in managing faculty-faculty conflict, and use a wide range of institutional and individual strategies for dealing with conflict among faculty.

THE GENERAL NATURE OF CONFLICT

Mini-Case

Imagine that Professors Jensen and Popovitch of the curriculum and instruc-tion department are serving as the coadvisors for the thesis of a student in their master's degree program, Ms. Nichols. Jensen's research training and experience is in quantitative methods, experiments with statistical analyses of information. Popovitch's research background and expertise is in qualita-tive methods, case studies, and narrative accounts with creative interpreta-tions of information. Because they are both experts in the field of adult liter-acy, the subject of Ms. Nichols' thesis, it is natural that they be the coadvi-sors of her project. All master's level research in this department requires supervision by coadvisors. After three unsuccessful attempts to get her advi-sors' approval for her specific research project, Ms. Nichols appeals to you,

chair of the department, to intervene on her behalf. She is exasperated because each faculty member insists that the project use the research method of his choice and neither is willing to compromise. She is angry about the additional time and tuition expense this conflict has caused her and insists that the department must assure her a means of completing her graduate degree.

By examining the specific features of this case, we can see elements that are common in most definitions of conflict. For the purposes of this chapter, let us define conflict as the situation arising when interdependent individu-als who perceive incompatible goals interact in order to gain something of value to them (Anderson, Foster-Kuehn, & McKinney, 1996). Virtually all definitions of conflict refer to people having incompatible goals. Clearly, Jensen and Popovitch have opposing goals for how research ought to be con-ducted. While conflict can involve real differences of interest between peo-ple, they may also emerge because of perceptions of incompatible goals. Similarly, conflict emerges only when people need each other in some way. If people with incompatible goals were not dependent on each other for some outcome, then their incompatible goals could simultaneously coexist with-out conflict emerging. In our case, because graduate student research proj-ects must be supervised by coadvisors, both faculty need each the other's cooperation if the project is to be completed.

Conflict manifests itself through communication. Thus the definition includes the notion of people interacting over salient issues. Presumably, in our case, Ms. Nichols designed a research project with methods which were satisfactory to one, but not both, of the coadvisors. Whether she served as the communication linkage between the disputing faculty or whether the faculty communicated to each other directly about preferred research meth-ods, it was interaction over important issues that triggered the conflict. Notice how a clash in schools of thought fuels this conflict as an intellectual endeavor, yet the conflict presents serious practical consequences to the stu-dent and to the department.

While conflict can take many forms and be based on many different issues, there are some predictable factors in how conflicts typically transpire. First, it is human nature to blame others as the cause of conflict. Perhaps as a psychological self-defense mechanism, people punctuate a series of events by claiming that the other person started the problem, and they are merely reacting to the other's provocation. When department chairs or deans hear about a conflict situation, therefore, they should realize that the faculty member describing the incident will naturally slant the story to his or her

advantage. Secondly, most people in conflict situations have a strong need to be right. This may be especially true for faculty who are accustomed to the role of expert or purveyor of what is correct and accurate. Department chairs and deans may want to find ways to help conflicting faculty members save face or preserve some of the feeling of being right. Thirdly, listening problems are inherent in conflict interaction. All parties in a conflict will lose listening effectiveness. They will hear what they want to hear, assume motive, make incorrect interpretations, and interrupt others. Administrators dealing with faculty conflicts may want to set some procedures by which the parties focus on listening to each other.

Likewise, effective conflict managers should be clear, specific, and redundant in communicating their points. Another common factor in conflict situations is people's belief in the primacy of rational thinking. Faculty especially think that rationality and reasoned discourse should prevail and is the best means of influencing others. Administrators who need to intervene in conflicts can capitalize on faculty's belief in rationality by creating conflict management procedures based on rational thinking. Department chairs and deans should be aware of the academic tendency to suppress emotion in favor of reason.

Many conflict management theorists have articulated common predispositions for handing conflict. People are predisposed to use a preferred style for dealing with conflict. Certainly alternate styles can be learned and strategic choices can be made about how to behave in conflict situations. Nevertheless, by realizing some typical conflict management modes, department chairs and deans can identify faculty members' response styles to conflict and intervene if stylistic differences seem to impede the satisfactory management of the conflict. Deutsch (1992) identifies six dimensions of conflict response. Though individuals habitually prefer a particular mode, they can modify behavior to embrace other styles.

1) *Conflict avoidance/conflict involvement.* Some people deny, suppress, or postpone conflict while others seek it out, enjoy it, or focus on disputes and disagreements.

2) *Hard/soft.* This dimension encompasses the continuum from aggressive, unyielding approaches to conflict on one end to gentle and unassertive styles on the other end.

3) *Rigid/loose.* The rigid approach seeks to establish rules by which conflict interaction will transpire while the loose style emphasizes improvisation and flexibility of communication in a conflict.

4) *Intellectual/emotional.* Some people are calm and detached in a conflict while others are emotionally intense.

5) *Escalating/minimizing.* This dimension refers to the tendency to perceive the conflict issues as large and to tie one's ego to the outcome or the tendency to lessen the seriousness of a conflict episode.

6) *Compulsively revealing/compulsively concealing.* In conflicts, people may be open and blunt about their feelings and attitudes, or they may avoid revealing feelings and thoughts.

While disputants may fall at the extremes or at the midpoint on any of these dimensions, it is clear to see some styles are incompatible. By knowing the dimensions underlying conflict management styles, department chairs and deans can help faculty understand variances in styles and perhaps try to negotiate the use of styles which have a greater success for effective resolution of conflicts.

DANGERS OF SUPPRESSED OR UNMANAGED CONFLICT

Mini-Case

Imagine the foreign languages department of 25 faculty who are polite but somewhat distant with each other. Their relationships with each other are impersonal and nonemotional. Each faculty member routinely teaches a set of courses which are not taught by anyone else. Each person has a small but private office. There are few department meetings, and when a meeting is scheduled, fewer than half of the faculty attend. Rarely do the faculty eat lunch together or socialize together off campus. There are not open displays of conflict, but the faculty seem dispirited and make occasional snide remarks about other faculty, administrators, and the college as a whole.

This case shows that not all conflicts surface as explicit disputes in which the parties divulge their grievances and interact to seek agreement. In some cases, conflict festers below the surface, suppressed or unmanaged for years. This hypothetical department, though not outwardly conflicting or hostile, may be experiencing repressed conflict or faculty avoidance of conflict. Each faculty member working in isolation on individual goals without collaboration to work on departmentally based tasks can signal suppressed conflict. While one might be inclined to leave well enough alone in such a nonhostile situation, there are many potential dangers of conflict avoidance. A lack of trust may underlie the isolating and impersonal style of behavior. Where there is a lack of trust, there is often withholding of information, the

subtle sabotage of ideas and projects, as well as political undermining and behind-the-scenes coalition building.

Other signs of suppressed conflict among faculty include frequent complaints, low morale, poor attendance at academic functions, competition, and lessening productivity. As illustrated in our case, when conflict festers below the surface, it may leak out in mildly dysfunctional behavior, such as sarcasm and absenteeism. Certainly administrators need not look for conflict where it does not exist. On the other hand, the lack of visible disagreements does not mean that conflict is absent from the faculty group. When faculty are truly functioning as a team with department, division, or college goals coexisting with individual goals, there will be conflicts surfacing from time to time. Effective faculty groups will embrace conflict, not avoid it, in order to deal with differences directly and effectively. Where conflict ceases to emerge at all in ongoing faculty groups, administrators should question whether suppressed conflict festers within the group and whether some interventions are necessary to get the group functioning more authentically. In the hypothetical example of the foreign languages department, the chair or dean surely would want to investigate whether suppressed conflict is one of the causes of this department's gross lack of cohesiveness.

THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AND DEANS IN MANAGING FACULTY CONFLICT

Administrators play crucial roles in managing faculty-faculty conflict, though they do not always perceive or embrace such roles. Probably the most important task for chairs and deans relative to faculty conflict is to influence the culture of the academic enterprise over which they lead, be it a department, division, school, or college. Through their leadership, chairs and deans can help to shape an environment where destructive conflict is absent or rare. In other words, the administrator's role in conflict frequently is a preventive one. Chairs and deans, through their legitimate power, personal persuasion, as well as the ability to reward and coerce, should expect teamwork and cooperation from the faculty in their units (Gmelch, 1995). In such an atmosphere, incompatible goals may surface, but they will be resolved through discussion, and the best interests of the unit will take precedence over individual interests. Administrators should send clear messages that destructive conflict will not be tolerated. By exerting leadership to influence faculty behavior in the academic unit, chairs and deans can play an important role in conflict management.

Another way for administrators to affect conflict among their faculty is to apply policy consistently. When administrators are arbitrary or capricious in the application of policy, competition among departments or among faculty becomes greater. For example, imagine that some faculty refuse to report days when they are sick, thereby avoiding using their sick leave benefits. Though the college policy requires that any absence due to illness must be reported, some faculty believe that sick leave should not be used if they arrange for a substitute to teach their classes or if they hold a make-up session with students at a later date. Some chairs or deans may think it a waste of their time to provide oversight to ensure the consistent application of this policy. For pragmatic administrators, some battles are worth fighting and some are not. However, if some faculty follow the policy and some do not, then over time, the seeds of conflict—envy, resentment, and hostility—surface. The perception will quickly emerge that administrators have their favorites who can bend the rules. No visible conflict may result, but the foundation for repressed conflict has been laid. If some faculty can ignore one policy, then other faculty may think they have the right to ignore other policy. The fair, consistent, and predictable application of policy will go a long way to reduce feuds, resentment, and discontent among faculty.

Strong leadership and the consistent application of policy will not prevent all faculty conflict, however. Faculty will still disagree over ideology, priorities, and procedures. When conflicts emerge, chairs and deans must decide when to intervene and when not to. Ideally, in most cases the faculty will possess the skills to resolve their own disputes, so administrative intervention becomes unnecessary. Indeed, one of the strategies of the administrator might be to equip faculty with the requisite conflict management skills. An effective intervention a chair or dean might make is to plan conflict management workshops for the faculty. Systematic attention by the chair or dean to the process by which faculty manage their disagreements should save much administrative effort in eliminating the need for case-by-case interventions later.

It will sometimes be necessary for administrators to involve themselves directly in the disputes among their faculty. This is especially true for chairs, who often are naturally drawn into departmental disputes. Gmelch (1995) indicates that chairs are expected to resolve collegial differences and that dealing with interfaculty conflict represents a major source of stress and dissatisfaction for chairs. Socialized as scholars first, chairs often have little training in any aspects of departmental management, especially the management of personnel disputes. It is understandable why they may

resist intervening in others' conflicts. But chairs and deans commonly are drawn into faculty conflicts by one or more of the disputants. While the next section of this chapter presents specific strategies for conflict management, let it suffice here to say that administrators can perform important functions of information seeking, clarification, and communication in interfaculty conflicts. To avoid those roles when conflict presents itself is to shirk administrative duties.

There is not always a clear answer about whether to intervene in faculty disputes. If the disputants do not seem able to manage the conflict themselves, if the conflict is affecting the morale of others, if students are being harmed in some way by the conflict, or if the issues have potential litigious consequences, then the administrator should intervene early in the faculty conflict. An objective but firm intervention by the dean especially can serve to remind the conflicting parties of the need for professional behavior and for speedy resolution.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

What follows is a range of informal to formal strategies which can be used alone or in combination for managing faculty conflict. Some are individual tactics which an administrator can use while others require systemic institutional implementation. Ideally, an institution should have all of these options in place for dealing with faculty conflict. Each strategy is explained briefly and a mini-case application of that strategy is presented. This chapter seeks to provide an overview of a variety of conflict management strategies rather than a detailed explanation of any one tactic. On the more formal mechanisms, such as ombuds offices, mediation, arbitration, and grievance hearings, administrators would benefit from additional information, training, or consultation on the subject before attempting to use those strategies.

Informal Facilitation

By using some standard interpersonal communication skills, chairs and deans can help faculty to effectively manage their disputes. Such communication competencies help administrators not only in the realm of conflict, but in many other aspects of their leadership role. Several basic communication skills are necessary when the administrator hears the complaint from each person separately as well as when the administrator gets the parties together to discuss issues. First, effective listening is crucial for resolving conflict. The chair or dean must be a patient and careful listener and should expect the same from the conflicting parties. The faculty disputants as well

as the administrator-as-facilitator should paraphrase statements made. Each person should objectively and specifically describe behaviors being manifested and desired behaviors. Assertiveness in stating one's goals and questioning others directly and diplomatically are additional tools to be used in conflict communication. Finally, all parties (the disputants and the facilitator) should show empathy for others' goals and feelings. People in conflicts often are willing to compromise or to put the conflict to rest merely because they felt listened to, had the opportunity to express themselves, and believed that someone understood their view.

Slaikeu (1996) describes interpersonal peacemaking, a process of informal facilitation which relies heavily on these interpersonal communication skills. Chairs and deans can use this process to encourage individual faculty to recognize ways they have contributed to conflicts. First, each party identifies the offense or hurt from his or her perspective. The facilitator encourages objective, concrete descriptions and careful listening. Secondly, the parties clarify their intentions. This helps to distinguish between intentions and outcomes. Faculty can often see that their colleagues did not intend to hurt them. Nevertheless, good intentions can still result in hurtful behavior. Next, each person discusses what they wish had happened. This sets the stage for stating desired behaviors or requesting change. Then, the facilitator helps the parties focus on resolution options and invites concrete offers for resolution. If each person offers a personal contribution for ending the conflict, conflict management has occurred. Finally, the administrator should summarize agreements and provide oversight to make sure that the faculty carry out the options to which they agreed.

Many faculty conflicts can be managed through this simple process. If disputing faculty come to know the process their chair or dean uses for helping them work through conflict, they can learn to apply effective communication techniques and interpersonal peacemaking strategies to their own disagreements.

Mini-Case

Imagine a situation where a dean has provided funds to two departments, history and English, to jointly purchase and share some instructional technology equipment. The two departments, located on adjacent floors of the same building, agreed on the purchase of a laptop computer, data projector, and instructional software. Now the departments cannot agree on the schedule of usage, shared maintenance costs, and security procedures relative to the equipment. Both department chairs have brought their respective complaints to the dean, who is faced with the task of informal facilitation of this

conflict. First the dean must listen carefully to the complaint from each department head, paraphrasing key points to check understanding. Likewise, each department head must be encouraged to listen to each other's concerns in the presence of the dean and to paraphrase key points in each other's story. Both chairs should be coached to objectively and specifically describe problem behaviors from each of their perspectives. Perhaps the English chair says that history faculty are frequently late in returning the equipment. Perhaps the history chair indicates that English faculty frequently leave the equipment unattended in the classroom. The dean's job would be to get the disputants to clarify what is meant by "frequently late" and "frequently unattended." How often do these behaviors occur? To what extent is the equipment returned late—several minutes, hours, days? To what extent is the equipment left unattended—several minutes, hours, days? The dean, as informal facilitator, can get the parties to empathize with each other's concerns by soliciting their feelings about late or stolen equipment interfering with their class objectives. Both parties likely would have similar feelings, which the informal facilitator should point out. A discussion of why the equipment is late or unattended, coupled with an examination of intentions versus outcomes, would move the parties toward peacemaking. Perhaps the parties do not intend to inconvenience each other or do not realize they are jeopardizing the equipment. Nevertheless, their behaviors lead to such outcomes. Next, the dean must move the parties to the solution step. Each person could diplomatically state desired changes. The dean should encourage the chairs to consider additional options and could suggest options as well. Suppose the chairs discovered that moving the equipment back and forth between departments throughout the day was causing the schedule and security problems, and they agreed that the equipment should be bolted to a movable cart and transported only once a day. The history faculty would use the equipment on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the English faculty would use it on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the first semester of each year, and the schedule would reverse during the second semester. The dean should secure this agreement in writing and check periodically to see how the arrangement is working. By using key communication strategies, the dean as informal facilitator can help the disputants solve this conflict in a short amount of time. Effective informal facilitation precludes the need to use more formal, contentious, and time-consuming conflict management strategies. Some persistent conflicts may require the next intervention on the continuum of conflict management tactics—negotiation.

Negotiation

By helping faculty to see themselves as friendly rivals with the goal of reaching an agreement through mutual concessions, chairs and deans can additionally help faculty manage their conflicts. Negotiation for conflict management purposes is a slightly more structured and formal process than informal facilitation, yet it is not as structured as a labor negotiation, for example. Here the emphasis is on the exchange of proposals and counterproposals as a means of reaching a mutually satisfactory settlement of the conflict.

First, the administrator-as-negotiator must help the faculty to see that they are involved in joint decision-making. The disagreement must be reframed from that of a conflict with winners and losers to a decision-making activity where disparate interests must be coordinated into an outcome. Faculty should be encouraged to use "we" language rather than terms like "me vs. you" or "us vs. them." By linguistically encouraging cooperation, the administrator helps the opposing parties to see themselves in relationship to each other or as one unit with a common task. The chair, who is helping faculty to negotiate a solution to conflict, should point out common interests and help the participants to see common ground. Each person must focus on interests or goals, not on positions.

Mini-Case

Imagine that two faculty hold different positions about curriculum requirements in the department of mechanical engineering. Professor Hernandez believes that students should take a full year of basic math and physics courses before taking any engineering courses. Professor Schwartz believes that principles of math and physics should be integrated into the engineering curriculum which students should begin as freshmen. Their positions are mutually exclusive, so they face conflict.

The department chair can assist in negotiation by getting each faculty member to see that they have the common interest of a rigorous, challenging, relevant curriculum for students. By acknowledging common interests rather than fighting for opposing positions, the faculty can pursue a variety of means for creating the curriculum. Perhaps neither of their original positions becomes the final outcome.

Once faculty agree on common goals, they should be encouraged to submit their respective proposals for achieving that goal. Professor Schwartz may propose an intensive, required summer tutorial in math and physics for all incoming freshmen engineering students. Professor Hernandez may offer a counterproposal or may amend the first proposal. Perhaps he suggests a

year-long math and physics recitation course during the academic year to accompany the engineering coursework. Numerous proposals should emerge with no one quite sure who proposed what. Lots of ideas should be put on the table for consideration. It is the negotiator's role to encourage brainstorming and a problem/solution orientation rather than a win/lose orientation to the conflict. The chair should ask each person to consider the merits of each other's proposals. At some point in the discussion, the merits of ideas should supersede the identification of which person proposed the idea. Defensiveness around the ownership of ideas lessens when there is agreement about the goal, and multiple parties contribute to the plan for achieving that goal. Where disagreements persist about the means to a common goal, the faculty should seek to persuade, not coerce, each other into making concessions. The chair should ask the disputants to analyze together the advantages and disadvantages of the various proposals. Collectively, they should build the best solution without regard to their individual, original positions.

Let's assume that Hernandez and Schwartz agree to setting higher admission standards in math and physics for incoming freshmen, requiring an intensive summer tutorial for selected students, and mandating a one-credit math and physics recitation course to be taken by all students in conjunction with their engineering coursework. This outcome would be superior to the initial proposals of the two faculty members in conflict. Through a process of negotiation, the solution is satisfactory to both parties, and neither feels a sense of having lost in the conflict. The same interpersonal communication skills described with informal facilitation can be used in negotiation.

Mediation

Should face-to-face negotiation fail to resolve conflict, the next step on the continuum of strategies is mediation. In this technique, an acceptable, impartial, and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision-making power assists disputants in reaching a voluntary settlement. This strategy is an extension of the previous two methods in that the same communication skills and decision-making processes are used, but the chair or dean does not serve as mediator. The administrator can assist the faculty in deciding to use mediators, identify qualified mediators, and can help the faculty agree on the selection of a particular individual as mediator.

Mediation as a conflict management process is somewhat more formal than the methods discussed previously. Those individuals serving as mediators should receive training in the mediation process. They need to be aware of typical stages of mediation, mediation techniques, notetaking, and the use

of written materials, and a range of communication styles and behavioral techniques that can be employed. Keltner (1994) describes mediation as a self-empowering process whereby participants take responsibility for making decisions, while using a third party to help them explore issues, identify alternatives, select outcomes, and implement decisions. Mediators can simultaneously help conflicting faculty examine their relationship issues, establish a process of resolving conflict, and explore the substance of the conflict. A full explication of the mediation process cannot be given within this chapter. Suffice it to say that chairs and deans should consider implementing a mediation process in their units. A range of legal, governmental, and community resources are available in most geographic areas to assist administrators in establishing mediation programs in colleges and universities.

Mini-Case

Imagine that a long-standing feud exists between Professor Georgiou of the fashion design program and Professor Latif of the graphic design program in the department of art at a small college. Each person routinely makes disparaging remarks about the other. Students are subjected to negative comments about each faculty member's professional expertise, teaching methods, and ethics. In desperation, a group of students has asked the department chair to put an end to this faculty feud which is affecting their attitudes and performance in the department of art. Because of the personal nature of this conflict and the need for the head to be perceived as absolutely impartial, using a mediator might be the best strategy for conflict management in this case.

The department chair should develop a short list of faculty from outside of the department of art who might serve as mediators. It is important that none of the possible mediators have any professional or personal connection to the disputants. Professors Latif and Georgiou should agree on the selection of a mediator. If this proves difficult, a name can be selected at random after each disputant has had the opportunity to eliminate one name from the list. The person serving as mediator should have had formal training in the mediation processes. The mediator's role is to help the disputants reach a voluntary agreement. The mediator would likely meet separately with each faculty member to learn the issues and explore possible solutions. At some point, the mediator would probably bring the disputants face-to-face for discussions. In this example, various relationship issues would need to be explored. The disputants would need to agree that the students' welfare supersedes their personal animosities. Eventually, both people would need to agree in writing to a plan of civil behavior and would need to state their

intentions to follow the plan. While a mediator is not likely to get the disputants to end the long-standing feud, he can get agreement on a plan of action for managing the conflict.

Ombuds Programs

Some colleges and universities have an ombudsperson who essentially serves as informal facilitator, negotiator, and mediator combined. Warters (1995) has labeled the college ombudsperson as perhaps the most enduring and successful multiple-constituency model of resolving campus conflicts. The ombudsperson is an independent, high-level person who receives complaints, pursues inquiries into the matters involved, and makes recommendations for suitable action (Lupton, 1984). This person deals with complaints from all constituencies in the institution including students, faculty, and staff. The ombudsperson has no vested interest in the outcome and no decision-making authority but merely seeks to serve justice. The ombudsperson raises questions, discovers facts, helps disputants to see others' perspectives on the situation, suggests options to the parties, and makes recommendations. An ombuds system has the value of existing in a formal organizational structure, but the methods of conflict resolution used in ombuds programs are informal ones. All of the elements of effective interpersonal communication, peacemaking, mutual concessions, common interests, and voluntary settlements relative to other conflict management strategies are used in ombuds programs.

Mini-Case

Imagine that two faculty members, who are specialists in human genetics, have collaborated to obtain a grant from the National Institutes of Health. Professor Garrett, from the department of biology in the College of Arts and Sciences, insists that laboratory experiments for the project follow a certain set of procedures. Professor Perkins, from the department of cell biophysics in the College of Medicine, insists on a different set of procedures for laboratory experiments. The two researchers must cooperate for the project to be completed and the final year of funding to be obtained. Since this conflict crosses college jurisdictions, there is not one chair or even one dean who can take on a conflict-management role.

The services of a university ombudsperson may prove useful in this case. This is another informal strategy for managing conflict where the disputants must agree to participate and must agree to the settlement. The ombudsperson would question both parties about the necessity for certain laboratory procedures, inquire about the importance of their agreement to project

completion, may suggest the consequences of their lack of agreement, and help them generate options. Initially, fact-finding is an important role for the ombudsperson. From both of their perspectives: What are the facts of the genetics research experiments which require certain lab procedures? What requirements might be set by the granting agency? The ombudsperson asks many questions, asks the disputants to look at the conflict from many perspectives, helps to generate options, makes concrete recommendations, and works diligently with the disputants for as long as it takes to solve the problem. The ombudsperson uses all of the techniques of informal peacemaking, negotiation, and mediation.

By being an employee of the university, she may bring knowledge, contacts, and resources of the university to the conflict-management task. But by being independent of the formal structure—not reporting to the deans of either the Arts and Sciences or Medical Colleges at the university, she can be blunt and assertive in working with the disputants. Since her job is conflict-management, she can devote more time to this situation than can a faculty-volunteer mediator. The ombudsperson would use all of the communication strategies we have discussed thus far to help the disputants reach a settlement.

Arbitration

This is a quasijudicial process in which a neutral third party makes a decision in a dispute when the parties in conflict cannot reach resolution. It is more formal than any of the procedures discussed previously, yet less formal than an actual court proceeding. There are two types of arbitration. In binding arbitration, both the institution and faculty member must accept the finding of the arbiter. In advisory arbitration, the arbiter makes a recommendation which may or may not be accepted. Arbiters typically are attorneys hired by the university.

The administrator's role in arbitration is to seek agreement from the disputants regarding arbitration and to either select the arbiter or help the disputants reach agreement in the selection of an arbiter. Once these decisions have been made, in the case of binding arbitration, the only remaining role for the chair or dean is to ensure that the arbiter's decision is implemented. Most of the work of an arbitration falls on the faculty disputants to prepare their cases, gather supporting data and evidence, and present information at the hearing. Since arbiters typically are attorneys not in the employ of the university, the administration incurs the costs of arbitration.

While not used frequently in higher education, arbitration can be useful when all other internal mechanisms for conflict management have failed. The disputants typically feel they have been given a fair hearing, whatever

the outcome, because they willingly participate in the process and realize the objectivity of a trained, external arbiter.

Mini-Case

Imagine that the board of trustees of the university has mandated that, as a cost-saving strategy, the department of computer science will merge with the department of computer engineering. The departments have two years to develop a combined curriculum and admission standards; create a common set of reappointment, promotion, and tenure requirements; and select a department head. At the end of two years, the departments have agreed on all of the tasks except the selection of a chair. The former chairs of the separate departments each have applied, as has one senior faculty member from each formerly separate department. With a pool of four candidates for department head, the faculty have reached a roadblock. They cannot agree on one candidate, and the dean fears alienating half of the newly formed department with whatever candidate she endorses. The dean might be well-advised to take this conflict to arbitration, thereby having an outside party ostensibly make the decision. An outside arbiter, not employed by the university but knowledgeable about university culture and leadership, would be hired to review the credentials of all candidates; interview candidates; assess faculty, student, staff, and alumni opinion; assess the dean's sentiments; and either make a recommendation in the case of nonbinding arbitration or select the new department chair in the case of binding arbitration.

While using an arbiter can be costly and can potentially embarrass an institution, in this case, the long-term benefits of having an external person make this sensitive decision may preclude hostilities and conflicts for years to come. If the arbiter seeks input from all relevant parties and makes a careful, informed decision, then all parties are likely to accept that decision, and the new department can proceed with its business unhampered by resentments and animosities.

Grievances

Most colleges and universities, whether or not the faculty is unionized, have a grievance policy. It specifies what types of disputes are grievable and the process and timetable by which a grievance hearing occurs. The procedural steps in grievance systems typically include an attempt at informal resolution and a formal hearing process. If the dispute cannot be resolved informally, an ad hoc committee hears the evidence and makes a recommendation, often to the college president.

While most faculty-initiated grievances are brought against administrators, there are circumstances in which one faculty member may grieve the actions of another. For instance, faculty may charge their colleagues with sexual harassment, discriminatory behavior, or violation of their academic freedom. Likewise, faculty who serve on promotion and tenure committees or merit salary allocation committees may find themselves the target of a grievance.

Chairs and deans must be thoroughly familiar with the institution's grievance policy. Commonly, it is the administrator's role to advise disputants about the use of the grievance process. Indeed, even if the administrator is the target of a grievance, one should not take the matter personally. In lieu of being named in a grievance, administrators may be called as expert witnesses in grievance hearings. Whatever the grievance role performed by chairs or deans, they must realize that grievance resolution is one of their primary responsibilities.

Mini-Case

Imagine that in the department of marketing, the faculty have developed a set of procedures by which merit salary adjustments are made on an annual basis. While the procedures are democratically derived, the department has voted that an internal personnel committee consisting of the chair and two senior faculty will actually implement the procedures and make merit salary awards. This year, after the merit salary decisions are announced, Assistant Professor Hannon appeals the fact that she was given the smallest monetary award.

First, Professor Hannon can make an informal appeal to the departmental personnel committee by presenting evidence and arguments in favor of a higher salary award and asking the committee to reconsider its decision. The personnel committee can change its decision or uphold its original award. If it upholds its original award, then Professor Hannon can present her case to a formal committee of her peers. The grievance committee consists of elected faculty from a variety of departments. A three-person panel of faculty, none of whom come from the College of Business, where the marketing department resides, would be comprised as a grievance evaluation committee. By established procedures, Professor Hannon would present her case for deserving a higher merit salary award and the marketing department personnel committee chair would present the department's case for awarding the lesser amount of money to Professor Hannon. After hearing all of the facts of the case, questioning both sides, examining the marketing department's process of awarding merit salary, and deliberating about whether or

not the process was applied fairly in this case, the grievance committee would either render a decision or make a recommendation to be reviewed by the college president. With such an established grievance process, conflicts can be settled objectively and quickly. Such a conflict management process would allow multiple grievances on an issue like merit pay to be handled quickly and with minimal animosity. But such a formal grievance process, with clearly articulated roles and procedures, must be established within an institution before specific conflicts can benefit from grievance hearings as a conflict management strategy.

THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT CLIMATE IN ACADEME

Whatever methods administrators use when intervening in faculty conflicts, they must create a climate where conflict is perceived as normal, where faculty are encouraged to openly express their views and freely debate issues, and where faculty are empowered to solve their own disputes as much as possible. There must be clear incentives for dealing with conflict in professional and productive ways and strong sanctions for immature or resistant behavior. Administrators need to shape the environment to reduce conflict, develop conflict management skills in their faculty, serve a models of effective communication in conflict situations, strategically intervene in faculty conflict, and lead the institution in developing effective conflict management systems.

The sources and issues of conflict among faculty are ever-present. Faculty will continue to disagree about resources, ideologies, priorities, and policies. They will continue to find themselves in conflict over disciplinary turf, curriculum issues, tenure decisions, authorship issues, academic freedom, and the like. It is imperative that administrators understand the ways in which academic cultures fuel conflict. They need to know the forms that conflict take and the styles people use when dealing with conflict.

They need to understand and embrace their roles as managers of conflict. Finally, administrators must be familiar with a wide range of conflict management strategies so they can lead their faculty and their units toward greater harmony, satisfaction, and productivity.

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