



Navigating Interpersonal Conflict in the Research Environment

Presented by:

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Welcome

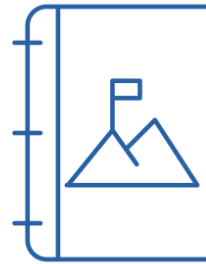


FACILITATORS

Dr. Kenneth Prager

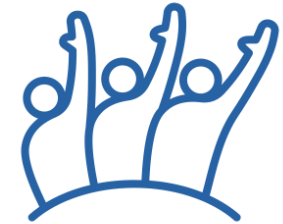
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AGENDA

Understanding Conflict and the Various
Types
Spotting Conflict
Managing Conflict
Case Studies
Q&A



OUR REQUESTS

Raise your Zoom Hand to Participate
Microphones on Mute
Cameras On
Send Questions to the Chat

Understanding Conflict

DEFINITION AND NATURE OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a state of disagreement, opposition, or tension between individuals or groups. It can arise from differing needs, values, goals, or perceptions, and is a natural part of any collaborative environment, including research settings.

COMMON SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN RESEARCH SETTINGS

Potential sources of conflict in research environments include authorship disputes, resource allocation, differing research directions or priorities, personality clashes, and personal agendas or hidden motivations.

What else would you add?

TYPES OF CONFLICT

INTERPERSONAL VS. INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICT

Interpersonal conflict occurs between two or more individuals, while intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual, such as when they experience internal tension or opposing desires.

TASK-RELATED VS. RELATIONSHIP-RELATED CONFLICT

Task-related conflict involves disagreements over work objectives, methods, or priorities, while relationship-related conflict stems from personal differences, communication breakdowns, or emotional tensions.

Look over there! I see conflict brewing!



Photo by David Pereiras from Noun Project

What are some additional signs of conflict?

What are the impacts of conflict on the research team?

Identifying Conflict

- **BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS**

Observable changes in body language, tone of voice, or communication patterns that signal underlying tensions or disagreements.

- **EMOTIONAL INDICATORS**

Heightened emotional responses, such as defensiveness, frustration, or withdrawal, that can hinder collaboration and open dialogue.

- **IMPACT ON RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY**

Conflicts can lead to decreased motivation, time spent resolving disputes, and a focus on personal agendas rather than the research goals. It also can impair the quality and reliability of the research you are conducting.

- **IMPACT ON TEAM DYNAMICS**

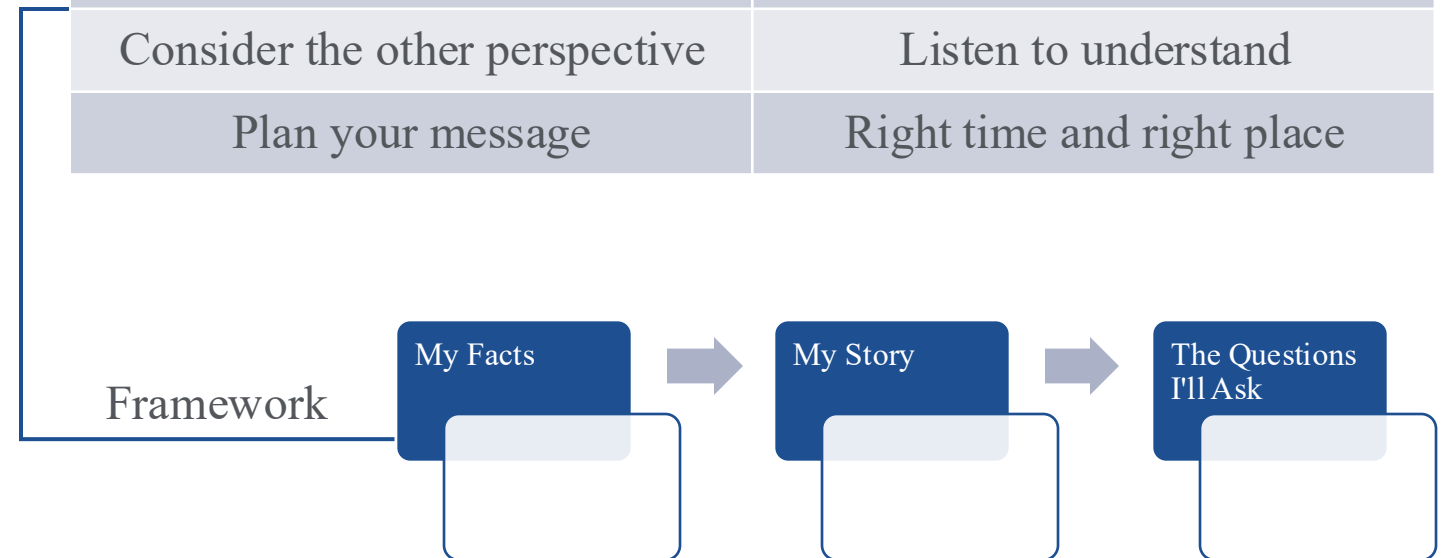
Conflicts can undermine trust, cooperation, and cohesion within the research team, potentially leading to a breakdown in communication and collaboration.

Strategies for Managing Conflict



Communication Skills

Me Stuff	We Stuff
Pause, assess, reflect	Lead with good intent
Consider the other perspective	Listen to understand
Plan your message	Right time and right place



Strategies for Managing Conflict

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Shift the focus from individual positions to shared interests, values, and goals. Emphasize areas of agreement and build upon them to reach a resolution.

PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

Utilize structured problem-solving methods, such as defining the problem, generating multiple options, evaluating alternatives, and collaboratively implementing the best solution.

MEDIATION AND NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

Facilitate open communication between parties, identify underlying interests, and find mutually acceptable solutions through compromise and consensus-building.

Preventive Measures

ESTABLISH CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND ROLES

**BUILD POSITIVE RESEARCH
CULTURE**

FOSTER INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION



**What else do you
think we can do?**

Case Study Analysis

- As a group, review two case studies
- A volunteer will read each case study to the group
- We will ask questions to solicit your thoughts and feedback about what is going on and how best to respond



Photo by Giuseppe Lombardo from Noun Project

Case 1: Are you even listening?!

Dr. June Apgar is an early-career Postdoctoral Research Scientist at Columbia University in a basic science department. Dr. Apgar has worked in the lab for two years. Dr. Apgar works closely with another postdoc in the lab, Dr. Dana Simon, who joined the team about a month ago.

Dr. Apgar and Dr. Simon were sitting at the bench reviewing the workflow for a new piece of diagnostic equipment that will support both of their projects, when Dr. Simon's phone started to buzz and vibrate. Dr. Simon pulled her phone out and started to respond to a text while Dr. Apgar was explaining how to calibrate the new equipment. Dr. Apgar in a frustrated tone says "Dana, are you even listening?!" and then grabs the phone out of Dr. Simon's hand and places it face down on the bench.

Dr. Simon is shocked by both the question Dr. Apgar asked and the fact that she grabbed her phone away from her. Immediately, Dr. Simon gets up and walks into the PI's office. Dr. Simon tells the PI that she refuses to work with Dr. Apgar and cites a series of moments where she felt Dr. Apgar was rude and dismissive of her while she's been getting oriented to the lab. The PI listens intently and thinks to herself... "Issues between these two already? I just talked to Dr. Apgar about managing her frustration appropriately with another team member... How am I going to get them to work together without conflict?"

Case 2: Collaboration chaos

Dr. Silvia Lee, an experienced molecular biologist, is leading a multidisciplinary research project on cancer biomarkers. The team includes Dr. James Patel, a computational biologist, and Dr. Maria Rodriguez, a clinical oncologist completing a postdoc fellowship. The project was funded for two years with a clear timeline and deliverables, including a manuscript submission within 18 months. During the first six months, the team made significant progress. However, tensions arose when disagreements emerged regarding data analysis methods and authorship on upcoming publications.

The Conflict:

1.Data Analysis Disagreement

- I. Dr. Patel advocated for a machine learning-based approach to analyze the data, citing its ability to uncover complex patterns.
- II. Dr. Lee preferred traditional statistical methods, arguing they are more widely accepted in the field and easier to validate.
- III. Dr. Rodriguez, focused on clinical application, worried the machine learning approach would be too complex for practical use.

2.Authorship Dispute

- I. Dr. Lee proposed a manuscript draft with herself as first author and Dr. Patel as second.
- II. Dr. Patel felt his contributions warranted first authorship, as the computational analysis formed the core of the findings.
- III. Dr. Rodriguez felt sidelined, as her clinical perspective was not adequately highlighted in a recent draft.

Escalation:

Meetings have become increasingly tense, with interruptions and dismissive comments being directed from and towards all three members. Center leadership expressed concerns a critical deadline was missed due to unresolved disagreements. Dr. Patel confided in a colleague outside the team, who shared the conflict with others, leading to reputational concerns within the institution.

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Additional Resources:

Articles:

[How to Handle Difficult Conversations at Work](#) (Harvard Business Review)

[Words and Phrases to Avoid in a Difficult Conversation](#) (Harvard Business Review)

[How to mend a work relationship](#) (Harvard Business Review)

LinkedIn Learnings:

[Communicating through Disagreement](#)

[Leading with Emotional Intelligence](#)

[Managing Team Conflict](#)

Books

[Guide to Dealing with Conflict by Amy Gallo](#) (Harvard Business Review)

[Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high](#) (Crucial Learning)

[Triggers by Goldsmith](#)

[Difficult Conversations by Stone, Patton, & Heen](#)