

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

# Conflict Management

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Institute for Academic Leadership  
Department Chairpersons Workshop  
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# FIU



# Session Objectives

- Define and identify types of conflict
- Recognize different (including your own) approaches to conflict situations
- Understand the relationship of interpersonal conflict and department chair roles
- Develop a “tool kit” of techniques for managing conflict situations

# Conflict

- What is conflict?
  - Some difference that results in disagreement
  - Latin: “striking together”

- In addition, conflict:
  - Is unavoidable
  - May signal a need for change
  - May indicate where the important/interesting issues are located
  - May be addressed in multiple ways
  - Can have positive/productive outcomes
  - Can be managed but seldom “solved”

# Potential Outcomes of Conflict

- Potential negative outcomes
  - Strained relationships
  - Difficult or awkward atmospheres
  - Lowered morale
  - Decreased productivity
- Potential positive outcomes
  - Increased understanding (e.g., of problems, others' perspectives, etc.)
  - Greater creativity or innovation
  - Improved relationships



# Major Types of Conflict

- Interpersonal:
  - Occurs between individuals
- Intra-organizational:
  - Occurs within an organization
- Inter-organizational conflict:
  - Occurs between organizations

Session focus:  
interpersonal

# Department Chair Constituencies

- Intra-institutional
  - Faculty/staff
  - Students
  - Supervisor/senior administration
  - Peers
- Extra-institutional
  - Alumni
  - Donors
  - Employers
  - Other community representatives

# Conflict Inherence

**“Chairs lead academic units with changing student needs, high level faculty expectations for advocacy, major fiscal problems, and unstable and uncertain work environments. They are expected to manage effectively the day-to-day operations of units and, concurrently, deal with numerous other role expectations of internal constituencies and external organizational referents. Conflict . . . is one of the only certainties under these conditions of work [emphasis added].”**

Dee, J., R., Henkin, A. B., Singleton, C. A., & Mack, K. M. (2004). Conflict management strategies of academic unit chairs. *Journal of Research in Education* 14(1).



# Conflict Inherence (cont'd)

**“Conflict in the university setting is an inherent component of academic life. Leaders spend more than 40% of their time managing conflict. Department heads are in a unique position—they encounter conflict from individuals they manage and from others to whom they report [emphasis added].”**

Stanley, C., & Algert, N. (2007). An exploratory study of the conflict management styles of department heads in a research university setting. *Innovative Higher Education*, 32(1), 49-65.

# Common Sources of Interpersonal Conflict

- Poor or different communication styles
- Varying interests and values
- Differing goals
- Scarce resources and resource allocation
- Personality differences
- Poor employee performance
- Divergent work or supervisory styles

# Conflict Resolution vs. Management

## Conflict resolution:

- Results in the elimination of conflict

## Conflict management:

- Results in minimizing the negative aspects (and, as possible, increasing the positive aspects) of conflict

## Conflicts do not have to be fully resolved

- However, conflicts should be managed so that the core business of the department can be conducted in a respectful fashion

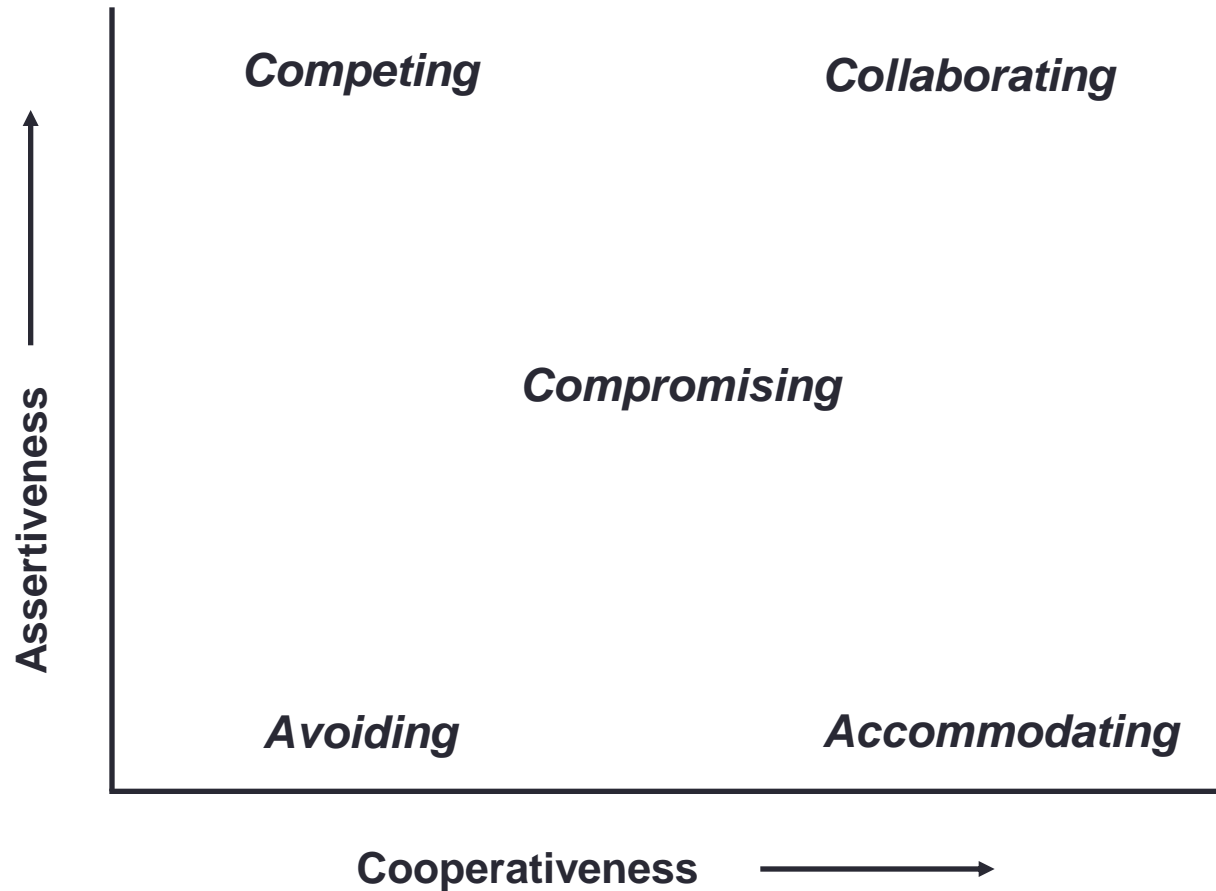
# Conflict Management Styles

- Conflict Management Styles Quizzes abound

What is YOUR default style?

# Conflict Management Styles

## What is YOUR Default Style?





## Conflict Management Styles (cont'd)

- **Avoiding: Non-confrontational approach**
  - When to use: Issue is unimportant or confrontation risk outweighs potential benefit
  - Downsides: Issue unaddressed, communicates lack of interest
- **Accommodating: Giving in to maintain relationships**
  - When to use: Maintaining harmony trumps issue or desire to leverage in future
  - Downside: May signal weakness or loss of credibility, breeds resentment

## Conflict Management Styles (cont'd)

- **Competing: Authoritarian style**
  - When to use: Important issue and posses sufficient influence, quick and goal oriented
  - Downside: May diminish outcome and/or others' contributions, breeds hostility
- **Compromising: I win some/you win some**
  - When to use: Complex issues, all parties equal in power
  - Downside: Sub-optimal solutions, unsatisfying

## Conflict Management Styles (cont'd)

- Collaborating: Everyone wins
  - When to use: Broad cooperation is essential and timetable permits greater deliberation, allows for building commitments
  - Downsides: Requires significantly more commitment and time, may be unrealistic

## (In)Active Listening Exercise

Identify a partner

Take turns sharing with your partner a conflict that has occurred within your academic unit

During the story, the second partner will evidence poor (i.e., non-active) listening skills

- For example:
  - Interrupt
  - Appear disinterested or distracted
  - Shake head “no”
  - Use negative body language

Switch roles. Each partner will have two minutes

# Active Listening Exercise Outcomes

- How did you feel when you were not being listened to?
- Keep that in mind regardless of how heated a situation becomes: always take the high road.
- Pay attention: sometimes inattentive listening behaviors are very ingrained.



# “I” Statement Exercise

- Identify a different partner
- Take turns rephrasing the “You” statements on the screen as “I” statements
  - For example:
    - “You” Statement: “You continuously interrupt others during departmental meetings.”
    - “I” Statement “I’m concerned that frequent interruptions are discouraging others from participating in the discussions.”
- You will have two minutes to complete the list

# “I” Statement Exercise (cont’d)

- Faculty:
  - You can’t have the travel funds you are requesting.
- Dean:
  - You consistently favor other departments over ours.
- Student:
  - Your disruptive behavior is ruining class for everyone.
- Staff:
  - Your late arrivals to the front office are unacceptable.

# Conflict Management Process

1. Make the approach
2. Share perspectives
3. Build understanding
4. Agree on solution(s)
5. Plan next step(s)

Mediation Services. (2003). *Foundational concepts for understanding conflict*.  
Winnipeg, MB, Canada.

# Conflict Management Meeting Techniques

1. Greet individuals normally (e.g., shake hands)
2. Sit in private area without obstructions or distractions; consider a neutral location
3. Keep voice low when speaking
4. Avoid humor or exaggeration
5. Encourage others to share their viewpoints fully and express appreciation for their perspectives
6. Be patient and utilize active listening (e.g., paraphrase, maintain eye contact and nod)
7. Use “I” statements

# Other Practical Tips

- KYO (Know Your Office) – culture and policies
- Departmental code of conduct
- Think beforehand about what your ideal outcome would be
- Separate emotions from facts
- Address conflict early-on if possible



# Other Practical Tips (cont'd)

- Beware the crying game
- Bullying situations
- Don't diagnose
- What other resources do you have? CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement), SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures), ombudsman, BIT (Behavioral Intervention Team), etc.

# Other Practical Tips (cont'd)

- Document, document, document
- Don't hesitate to visit or call your General Counsel
- Be safe