

Workshop D – Professional development: managing conflict and difficult conversations

Member Peer Conference

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Workshop D – Professional development: managing conflict and difficult conversations

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Ground rules for today

- 'Chatham House' rule
 - Respect others' views
 - Phones on silent
 - Finish when we say we'll finish
 - What else?
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Introductions

- Name
 - Council and role
 - How long have you been a councillor?
 - Issues you would like to cover
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Storm in a teacup?

Table Discussion

Reflect on a situation where you have had two vocal groups or individuals with differing views on a situation that needs to be addressed.

- How was the conflict resolved?
 - How did you feel about the outcome?
 - How did the others involved feel about the outcome?
 - Could the situation have been handled differently?
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What is conflict?

- Conflict is everywhere. It is not something we can choose to have or not have. It just is.
 - A conflict may be about a particular subject but is, in fact, a combination of factors. It may also be a symptom of a more deep routed concern or fear.
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Root causes of conflict

- **Commodities/ Possessions**
 - Money, objects
 - **Principles**
 - Morals
 - Politics
 - Religion
 - Personal reputation
 - **Territory**
 - Location
 - Status
 - Privacy
 - Responsibility
 - Identity
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Root causes of conflict

- Relationships
 - Power struggles
 - Clashes of personality
 - Misuse or abuse of power
 - Misunderstanding
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Individual styles of conflict

- Street fighter
- Expressive creator
- Amiable pacifier
- Analytical thinker

Which one are you?

Conflict resolution - skills

- Empathy
 - Active listening
 - Assertiveness
 - Problem-solving
 - Facilitation
 - Tenacity
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Exercise

- Imagine you are facilitating a Corporate Peer Challenge session with opposition Members and you are confronted with the following characters.
 - A noisy participant who insists on shouting people down when they disagree with him?
 - A persistently quiet participant who looks attentive but rarely says anything without being prompted?
 - A participant who has a tendency to use inappropriate humour to the irritation of some members of the group?
 - Identify the tactics you would employ to deal with each person.
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You can prevent group conflict if...

- People are prepared to listen first and talk/act second
- Everyone's contribution is respected and valued
- Those in dispute are willing to amend their viewpoint in the light of others' suggestions
- Questions are used positively to encourage others to elaborate on their thoughts
- Those involved look to build on ideas and identify areas of common ground

Leading difficult conversations

- Preparation is key
- Be yourself – no defensiveness/ hidden agendas
- Listen first and talk second – understand and address their concerns
- Maintain your assertiveness ... appropriately
- Share your experiences & feelings to establish empathy
- Explore options together – is there another option to achieve the desired outcome?
- Keep people and problems separate

Effective questioning

To prompt dialogue you need to use a range of techniques:

- **Closed questions** – direct questions that require a one word answer, eg ‘yes’ or ‘no’.
 - **Open questions** – the ‘how’, ‘why’, and ‘what’ type of questions that require a more expansive response.
 - **Leading/limiting questions** – questions designed to limit the range of possible answers, eg ‘Is it true that...?’
 - **Soft commands** – prompts which sound like questions to elicit information, eg ‘perhaps you could explain...?’
 - **Paraphrasing/summarising** – repeating what you have heard and asking for a confirmation of accuracy.
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Bad listening habits

- **Pseudo-listening** – appearing attentive, perhaps even saying ‘yes’ while thinking about something else.
 - **Turn-waiting** – waiting for others to finish so that you can say what you think. As you plan your response, you are not listening.
 - **Selective listening** – filtering out the bits you do not want to hear or do not agree with.
 - **Defensive listening** – looking for faults in other people’s views or areas you can disagree with.
 - **Insensitive listening** – taking people’s words at face value without trying to understand what is behind them.
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Tactics in influencing

- Recognise what might affect you when trying to influence
- Present thoughts, ideas and arguments clearly and succinctly
- Avoid certain behaviours, e.g. irritators, defend/ attack spirals
- Be tactical: Is this the right time, place, approach?
- Test others' understanding
- Use language which will help gain support

Reflections

What might you do differently
after today?