

INTRODUCTION

Facilitation is never plain sailing. Many teams identify their need for team development during a crisis or period of conflict. New groups who are 'storming' and teams who are 'performing' will all have times of conflict - unavoidable given the ever complex and dynamic environment of primary care. Handling conflict is a skill that all facilitators will need as teams test their own boundaries during periods of change and development and often have to move out of the comfort zone and into the unknown. The following fact sheet identifies sources of conflict and strategies to encourage movement towards co-operation.



What is Conflict?

Conflict is a process which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his/her. Conflicts can be based on:

- ▶ differences in needs, values and goals
- ▶ scarcities of resources, such as power, influence, money, time, space
- ▶ rivalry and competition for resources
- ▶ departmentalisation and specialisation
- ▶ the nature of work activities
- ▶ role conflict
- ▶ inequitable treatment
- ▶ violation of territory
- ▶ environmental factors

As a team increases in size and function, conflict as a result of differences in resources, culture, values and goals are more likely to arise. Handled well, conflict can be beneficial, it can help to:

- ▶ Produce creative decisions and outcomes
- ▶ Develop understanding and respect
- ▶ Increase energy and motivation
- ▶ Increase self-awareness and
- ▶ Develop appreciation of differences

Left alone conflict can undermine and sabotage the goals of the whole organisation.

Managing Conflict and Frustration

When conflict occurs in a group, the facilitator has several options on what course of action to take:

- ▶ Leave the conflict to be resolved by members of the group
- ▶ Intervene directly during the group
- ▶ Deal with the conflict directly in private
- ▶ Deal with the conflict in private via a third party.

The key is to determine what action to take and the timing of the intervention.

Facilitating Conflict Resolution

The causes of conflict offer a helpful framework for encouraging a group to identify the root cause of their conflict. Competing values, role conflict and inequitable treatment often lie at the heart of conflict situations. As a facilitator you will need to encourage a group to deal openly and honestly with conflict and help them to develop their understanding and strategies for conflict resolution.

Strategies for Conflict Resolution

1. Pinpoint Conflicts

Identify the specific points of conflict. List the similarities and differences on a flip chart, help people to see that they do not disagree on all points and encourage them to approach it more analytically.

2. Identify Options for Approaching Conflicts

Differentiate between those conflicts that must be resolved and those that are less critical. Remind a group that there are alternative ways to handle conflict

- Compete
- Collaborate
- Compromise
- Avoid
- Accommodate

and encourage them to be explicit about where they stand.

3. Differentiate Positions from Interests

Often people offer **solutions** and **strategies** or **alternative ways** of doing things as opposed to being explicit about the **need** or **desire** that they want satisfied by that solution. Encouraging openness by asking 'why does that matter to you?' can help to identify interests and help the group to look at solutions that may be congruent with both.

Facilitating Interpersonal Conflict

There may be times when continued tensions between two people in the room serve to undermine group process and for the most part these are best handled outside the main group. Some of the ground rules used to support mediation between two people are also helpful reminders for dealing with conflict in the main group for example:

- ▶ Use I statements
- ▶ Be specific
- ▶ Exchange views and requests one at a time
- ▶ No characterisations or name calling
- ▶ Don't raise your voice
- ▶ Listen without interpretation
- ▶ Understand first before responding.

Contracting

Remember that a lot of difficulties can be avoided or more easily managed by the group if there is a contract. Establishing ground rules/behaviour resolution takes fifteen minutes, encourages a safe environment and a stable platform for group interaction and contributions.