

Tip Sheet

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Conflict Resolution Strategies for Teams and Other Collaborations

Inability to deal directly with conflict, whether organizational, interorganizational, interprofessional, or interpersonal in nature, is perhaps the most critical obstacle to effective collaboration. Conflict can be anticipated if:

- The participants have a history of adversarial relations.
- The collaboration includes ideologically diverse participants or those with different professional or organizational cultures.
- The outcome will potentially shift dominance from those in power.
- There are divergent outcome interests.
- New issues or players emerge.

Consensus Building and Conflict Resolution Strategies

- Deal with safer issues initially.
- Partialize conflicts into manageable parts and into areas where there is common ground.
- Identify the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of each alternative into one solution.
- Use decision criteria jointly agreed on.
- Consensus can be gained incrementally—a piece at a time.
- Reframe issues in terms of others language or ideology.
- Demonstrate support and respect for differences—build culture where difference is tolerated—leave self-righteousness at home.
- Emphasize unifying themes.
- Reach for indirect expression of difference—don't paper over underlying but deeply felt disagreement.
- Recognize differences due to professional socialization rather than personal issues and develop strategies more relevant to those kinds of differences.
- Maintain a professional demeanor.

Ground Rules for Discussions with Potential for Conflict

- Show respect for others.
- Remain non-judgmental.
- Avoid “zapping” such as put-downs or accusatory statements.
- Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements.

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