Conflict Management and Group Dynamics: A Postdoc Office Perspective

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Since conflict is unavoidable, the goal should be to manage conflict in the most productive way.
Why is Topic Important?

- In science or technical professions, often people do not recognize the impact of cultural differences in their work.

- Cross-cultural issues may lead to significant underutilization of talent.

Common Sources of Conflicts in the Workplace

- Lack of clear expectations
- Poor or ineffective communication styles
- Avoidance or ineffective problem-solving skills
- Different values
- Different goals and interests
- Competition and limited resources within group
- Personality clashes and other group dynamics
- Poor performance or attitude
Underlying Sources of Cross Cultural Conflicts

Real or perceived differences:
- Appearances
- Communication or language
- Gestures and body language
- Temporal or spatial consciousness
- Values, worldviews, and cultural norms
- Mental processes and learning styles
- Work habits and practices including concepts of teamwork, management, performance, authority, hierarchy, etc.

What happens when these different sources of conflict combine?

What does it mean for a culturally diverse postdoctoral population in the workplace?
Effective Strategies for Managing Conflict in the Workplace
For Postdocs

In the Immediate:
- Stay productive, keep on top of your duties and deadlines.
- Assert control over the aspects of your job where you have power.
- Explore what informal or formal options (i.e. what are the policies, avenues for filing a complaint, formal grievance procedures, informal mediation) may be available. Resources/Roles:
  - Postdoc Office/Dean’s Office
  - Research Integrity Officer
  - Ombudsman
  - EEO/ADA or Equity and Diversity Officer
  - Human Resources
- Consider time off, vacation days, a “cooling off period” or personal holiday.
Long term planning:

- Work with a career coach or counselor. Engage in career-exploration: what are your strengths and weaknesses? What parts of present and past jobs did you like most and least? What steps might you take to achieve your long-term goals?
- Take advantage of professional development opportunities aimed at strengthening interpersonal communication and conflict management skills.
- Develop a potential exit plan or strategy for leaving current situation.
Take care of self:

- When people are under stress, or feeling uncertain, or impacted by changes beyond their control, they need lots of support.
- Spend quality time with your family and friends who care about you, ask for support, be open to receiving caring gestures from others.
- Consider seeing a professional counselor or psychotherapist, or talking confidentially with a clergy person. Other local or campus resources:
  - Women’s Center
  - LGBTQ Center
  - Multicultural Affairs or International Center
  - Disability Services
  - Counseling and Wellness Services

Adapted from Wagner, Marsha. *Dealing With Really Stressful or Unstable Workplace Situations*. New York: Columbia University,
References

