



Department Chair Online Resource Center

Managing Conflict

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A 1990 survey (Gmelch, 1991) of roughly 800 department chairs from 100 research institutions identified the primary sources of stress among practicing department chairs. The second most frequently mentioned source of stress was confrontation with colleagues. This category included conducting performance evaluation, making decisions that affect the lives of faculty colleagues, and resolving differences between faculty colleagues. Conflict is possible, if not probable, in many of the duties and responsibilities assigned to department chairs. Those duties that might lead to conflict include, but are certainly not limited to, assigning courses and course times, offering summer contracts, recommending salary increases, assigning office space, recommending promotion and tenure, filling open positions, stipulating the use of student workers and secretarial support, determining access to computers, allocating long-distance telephone privileges, awarding travel support, and making committee assignments.

The opportunity for conflict increases when department chairs must manage with declining human and fiscal resources, but conflict can erupt even in instances when there is (or should be) no real disagreement. Readers of Gary Larson's "Far Side" may recall the cartoon that pictured two identical desks, each equidistant from the only window in the room. The man seated behind one of the desks is pointing at the other desk while he shouts, "Someday that desk will be mine!" Whether logical or not, conflict will develop among people who work together. Sometimes department chairs must manage conflict that exists among others, including disagreements between faculty members or between faculty and students. At other times, department chairs must manage conflict between themselves and others, such as disagreements with faculty, students, or central administration. The fact that confrontation with colleagues surfaced as the second most often mentioned source of stress in a survey of some 800 chairs may be indicative of both the discomfort of managing conflict and the frequency with which department chairs encounter conflict. Department chairs need to know how to manage conflict effectively.

THE OBJECTIVE

One goal of this chapter is to illustrate the difference between resolving and managing conflict. Too often, chairs assume responsibility for resolving conflict when the goal should be to manage conflict. Department chairs need to reconceptualize the task of managing conflict and adopt proactive strategies

for managing conflict. A second goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how department chairs can develop a repertoire of communication strategies for managing conflict. The art of managing conflict is a skill that can be learned and improved. The case studies presented in this chapter allow chairs to practice and sharpen their skills in managing conflict.

DEFINING THE TASK

It is important to recognize the difference between resolving conflict and managing conflict. The goal of conflict resolution is conflict elimination. Conflict resolution is often an impossible task and not always a desirable goal. Department chairs who accept conflict resolution as their ultimate objective will undoubtedly fail. Conflict management is directed toward reducing destructive conflict but allows for the existence of constructive conflict. Department chairs who accept conflict management as the objective realize that all conflict cannot or should not be eliminated. It will help to understand some basic facts about conflict.

Conflict is inevitable. Conflict is a natural outcome of human interaction. Conflict exists whenever there is disagreement and derives from differences in attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. Conflict can result from differences in perception as to what has happened or what needs to be done. Whenever two or more people disagree about a decision or action, conflict exists. Conflict is inevitable because not all persons think alike. Not all persons hold the same values or priorities. Not all persons react to situations in the same manner. Those facts make conflict resolution virtually impossible.

Conflict can be positive. It is important to remember that conflict is not inherently destructive. In fact, some conflict is desirable. In a constructive mode, conflict can improve problem solving, clarify issues or expectations, increase participant involvement and commitment, and result in a better decision or outcome. If all faculty held the same views on every issue, final decisions and recommendations would not account for the full range of ramifications. If all faculty thought alike, departments would experience little change. Change that results in improvement typically grows out of conflict.

Conflict can be managed. Conflict that is allowed to run its own course is more likely to be destructive. Department chairs need to be ready to manage conflict. However, two precautions must be noted. First, how a department chair responds to a conflict affects the conflict. Even when a department

chair opts to ignore an existing conflict, his or her silence affects the conflict. Second, the department chair's response is never static in that a chair brings to each conflict a personal set of beliefs, perceptions, and expectations. Chairs need to remember that their perception of the persons involved or the situation may not be congruent with reality. Everyone, including department chairs, views conflict from his or her own biases despite the best of intentions.

Conflict resolution is not always the goal. Conflict management, unlike conflict resolution, acknowledges that human interaction is dynamic and that people do not always think or act alike. Because conflict results from differences in attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, a conflict-free environment would be one that is so homogeneous that it could not be optimally innovative or productive. The goal becomes maximizing constructive conflict and minimizing destructive conflict. Conflict management includes those times when chairs need to initiate or encourage conflict to achieve a positive outcome.

RELEVANT COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES

The task of managing conflict is not limited to those moments when confrontation is apparent. A department chair's role in managing conflict includes preconflict and postconflict communication. A chair's daily communication with faculty, staff, and students can do a lot to minimize destructive confrontation and set the stage for more effective conflict management when differences surface within the department. The following communication strategies (Higgerson, 1991, 1992b) prescribe a proactive posture for department chairs in managing conflict.

Establish and maintain a healthy work environment. Much has been written about the importance of the work environment (sometimes termed the department climate) to the overall morale and productivity of the unit. A healthy work environment is characterized by open and effective communication. In a healthy environment, faculty discuss differences of opinion in a candid and constructive manner without fear of retaliation. There is a high degree of mutual respect and trust within the department.

The presence of a healthy work environment gives the department chair an advantage in managing conflict. The work environment sets the tone for conflict and conflict management. If mutual respect and trust exists among colleagues, and faculty air differences openly and constructively, there is

less opportunity for destructive conflicts to escalate because individuals are less prone to perceive differences of opinion as personal attacks or components of some hidden agenda.

It is important to realize that individual academic departments can have a climate that, though vulnerable to the total campus climate, can be very different from the campus environment. For example, a department with very low morale can exist on a campus that generally has high faculty morale. It is also possible to have a department with very high faculty morale on a campus that is characterized by a dismal climate. Department chairs need not inherit a poor or destructive campus climate. Instead, chairs need to cultivate a healthy work environment that is conducive to effective management. Specific suggestions for enhancing the department climate are presented in Chapter 2.

Be clear in communicating your goals and expectations for the department and faculty performance. Conflict is more likely to occur when communication is not clear and when there is confusion about what is valued and rewarded. It is the responsibility of the department chair to make goals and expectations clear. It is imperative that the chair help faculty translate the more general university expectations into activities and achievements that are discipline specific. For example, the university may have as part of its mission a commitment to service. The faculty handbook may stipulate that faculty seeking tenure and promotion have a documented record of professional service. The department chair is responsible for making certain that individual faculty understand what specific activities count as evidence of professional service. Does professional service encompass volunteer activities within the community such as working on blood drives or teaching Sunday school? Is professional service limited to positions held and activities performed within the professional associations of the academic discipline? Perhaps professional service includes volunteer activities in the community, but only if the work draws upon the faculty member's discipline expertise. It is the department chair's responsibility to make certain that faculty understand specific expectations for faculty work. The chair must also advise faculty on how best to invest their time and energy in acceptable activities in order to meet department and university standards in the areas of teaching, research, and service.

Department chairs must also be consistent in recognizing and rewarding faculty who meet department and university standards. If campus policy requires faculty to demonstrate effective teaching, this standard cannot be lowered for some faculty. That is sometimes difficult because we tend to evaluate individuals on the basis of their total effort. A chair may want to be more lenient in interpreting teaching effectiveness for a faculty member who is outstanding in securing external grant

dollars. Such a double standard, no matter how well-intentioned, is costly to the department climate and the chair's credibility.

The department chair can effectively defuse potential conflict if the department goals and expectations for faculty performance are clear and consistently applied. When the faculty understand department goals and expectations, they have an underlying logic for many of the department chair's decisions and actions. For example, if the faculty recognize that the department has a priority for professional travel that accrues recognition for the department, they understand why a faculty member who presents a paper at a national meeting receives more travel support than the faculty member who merely attends the same meeting. The chair can defuse potential conflict that might result from a perception of favoritism (or discrimination) by equipping faculty in advance with the logic underlying the chair's decision.

Establish ground rules for airing disagreement. The task of managing conflict becomes easier if chairs establish ground rules for airing disagreements. For example, a ground rule might dictate that different opinions will be heard and respected or that abusive language will not be tolerated. Such ground rules help to establish boundaries for airing disagreements in a constructive (and professional) manner. Department chairs can establish as many ground rules as they believe necessary for maintaining an environment that is conducive to effectively airing disagreements. The specific ground rules imposed in a particular department will, to some extent, be a product of the chair's personality and management style. Ground rules also respond to the specific personalities within the department. While there is no standardized list of ground rules, some guidelines that the chair might establish include the following:

- Abusive language will not be tolerated.
- Derogatory comments that represent personal attacks on colleagues will not be tolerated.
- Differences of opinion will be discussed and everyone will be heard.
- Department members can express their views without interruption or fear of retaliation.
- Unsubstantiated assertions will not influence the vote or outcome.
- Issues, not personalities, are subject to debate.
- Tears or emotional outbursts do not derail discussion of substantive issues.
- Department issues will be discussed and decided at department meetings, not by any subgroup of faculty.

Ground rules are most effective if they apply to all members of the department and are enforced across all situations. Department chairs cannot expect to preserve a ground rule of hearing and discussing differences of opinion in a professional manner if they tolerate verbal outbursts from even one faculty member. Ground rules only help a chair manage conflict if they are applied uniformly across all members of the department. When applied consistently, however, ground rules increase the chair's credibility within the department.

Ground rules help a department chair keep the conflict on the issue of disagreement, which is important to effective conflict management. Crying is one behavior that tends to shift a conflict situation away from the issue of disagreement. A department chair may switch from the issue of disagreement to a more supportive role when confronted with tears. This shift changes the agenda from one of airing the disagreement to nurturing or mending a broken spirit. Crying is one behavior that some persons may use to avoid an issue of disagreement. If that becomes the case, a department chair needs to establish a ground rule for managing those situations. For starters, the chair must make it clear that crying is not rewarded and that the issue of disagreement will be discussed. When the faculty member breaks into tears, the chair might abort the discussion and say, "Obviously, you're not able to discuss this matter at this time." The chair may offer to leave for a few moments while the faculty member regains composure. The chair might tell the faculty member that upon the chair's return the faculty member can indicate whether he or she can continue the conversation or another time needs to be scheduled to discuss the matter. This response makes clear that the issue of disagreement will be discussed and that any amount of crying will not alter that fact.

Anticipate conflict areas and be ready to intervene when needed. Intervention does not need to wait until a conflict erupts. Intervention is most effective when it prevents or defuses a conflict. For example, a department chair might anticipate conflict following the hire of the first minority member of the department. The department chair may fear that other faculty will not accept or value fully the first minority hire. To minimize this potential conflict, the department chair needs to intervene and clearly establish the new faculty member's value within the department through the chair's rhetoric and actions. The chair may, for example, solicit the new faculty member's opinion of a salient issue during a department meeting. The chair can appoint the new faculty member to one of the more significant department committees. Another form of chair intervention is to include the new hire in informal and social activities such as lunch groups or the department's softball team. The potential conflict will be minimized if it is clear that the department chair values the new hire's contribution to the department.

Successful early intervention requires that chairs notice and accurately interpret communication cues that signal a brewing conflict. Chairs should pay close attention to the following cues.

Changes in behavior. The chair should note when a talkative person becomes silent or when a quiet person becomes vocal, when a person who is prompt and responsive becomes lax and lethargic, and when a department member alters his or her routine behavior (or dress) in any way. Noticeable changes in verbal and nonverbal behavior typically evidence changes in attitude. When those changes occur, the chair can anticipate that the relationship among faculty and staff in the department will be altered.

Changes in policy. It doesn't matter whether a new policy is imposed by the central administration, an accrediting body, or by vote of the department faculty. New policy represents a change and, as described in Chapter 6, change is uncomfortable for many people. New policy (even when wanted) can transform reasonable and confident faculty into irrational and insecure human beings.

Changes in the department. This might be a new chair, a new faculty member, a retirement, a significant increase (or decrease) in enrollment, office relocation (or renovation), the integration of new computer equipment, curriculum revision, or a change in any aspect of the department that affects faculty. Changes in the department typically require the chair's intervention. (Chapter 6 includes strategies for when and how the department chair should intervene to effectively implement change.)

Know when and how to confront conflict. There are times when it is necessary and advantageous to confront conflict. A department chair, however, must remain the manager of conflict rather than a participant in a destructive confrontation. The following four conditions help determine when and how to confront conflict.

Timing. The worst time to confront a conflict is when the conditions are such that the department chair will be less able to manage the confrontation. This includes those moments when voices are raised and participants are not thinking rationally. It is a difficult concept to internalize because most chairs tend to believe that they must do something immediately when

others in the department are engaged in a heated argument. Chairs who attempt to resolve or manage heated discussions when the participants are exercising more emotion than logic will discover that the most they can do is referee. Few disputants are ready to see reason or be open-minded during a heated argument. By waiting, the department chair can create an opportunity for each disputant to relinquish his or her original position privately. Department chairs need to be proactive and more calculating in deciding when and how to confront conflict.

That does not give chairs license to turn a blind eye to a heated discussion between two faculty members in the department lobby. Obviously, that behavior is inappropriate and cannot be permitted. There is, however, a difference between stopping inappropriate behavior and managing the conflict. A chair may, for example, terminate the heated discussion by saying, "Both of you should realize that this is not an appropriate place to air this disagreement. I suggest that the three of us sit down and talk this through tomorrow at 3:00 p.m. in my office." That strategy terminates the inappropriate behavior and allows the parties involved to cool off before addressing the issue of disagreement. It also makes clear that the difference of opinion will be aired for the purpose of reaching some workable solution.

Know the facts . Perception is not always reality. If department chairs know the relevant facts, they can distinguish reality from perception. This is the key to remaining neutral when confronting conflict between faculty members or between faculty and students. It is also critical to the chair's success in confronting a conflict that the chair may have with a faculty member, a student, or the dean.

Chairs should make an effort to gather relevant facts. For example, if one student complains that a professor discriminates against women students, the chair will want to gather some information before acting on the complaint. The process includes some reflective analysis of any previous complaints that may or may not substantiate the student's claim. The chair may recall positive comments that other students offered regarding this professor. The chair may remember personal observations of the professor's interaction with women students. The chair can also solicit the professor's assessment of the complaining student's academic performance. Collectively, this additional information creates a context within which the chair can more accurately separate fact from perception and assess the merit of the initial complaint.

Depersonalize the issue. When confronting conflict, it is important to focus the discussion on the issue and not the personalities involved. There is, for example, a significant difference between telling someone that "the department needs your commitment and support" and asserting that "you only look out for yourself." The first statement depersonalizes the conflict and describes a behavior or performance expectation. The second statement personalizes the issue of disagreement and attacks the personality of the person. By personalizing the statement, the chair implies that the objectionable behavior is the result of some character flaw and does not suggest that the person can change the unacceptable behavior.

Unfortunately, not everyone seeks to minimize destructive conflict. Some people want to escalate a conflict and often do so by personalizing the issue. Take, for example, the faculty member who hates to lose an argument but typically holds a minority viewpoint. Such a person, sensing that most of the faculty disagree, is likely to resort to shifting the discussion from the issue being debated to the personalities involved. He or she may assert, "I don't understand why you can't get this," or may blurt out, "You never could understand the larger issues." Such statements bring out defensive behavior in those who believe that they have been personally attacked. A department chair managing such conflict needs to intervene and depersonalize the exchange. It is particularly helpful if the chair's intervention can precede any defensive response from the person who's been attacked. The chair's intervention needs to redirect the discussion to the substance of the issue and dismiss the personalized comment. For example, a chair might say, "Does anyone have anything to add regarding the substance of this issue?" Over time, consistency in the chair's response will help to establish a new ground rule that personalized attacks will not be heard when the department discusses an issue on which there is a difference of opinion.

Don't prolong the confrontation. Department chairs cannot afford to carry a grudge. Once the chair confronts the conflict and makes it clear what behavior is unacceptable, the chair should drop the issue. This is important to the chair's overall relationship with each faculty member. Department chairs cannot allow a disagreement over one issue to shape their relationships with individual faculty. The faculty (and even the dean) need to know that the department chair holds them in high regard and respects their contribution even when the chair disagrees with their thinking on one particular issue. Typically, the faculty will be relieved and grateful if normal communication on more harmonious issues can place the disagreement in a

larger, more productive context. As a general rule, the more heated the disagreement on a particular issue, the sooner the chair should initiate a discussion with that disputant on a different and more agreeable subject.

Know when and how to initiate conflict. Sometimes a conflict that remains below the surface can be destructive to department productivity and faculty morale. Differences of opinion can become larger than the original issue of disagreement if allowed to fester and build. Chairs can release potentially destructive tension by initiating conflict and allowing the disagreement to be aired in a constructive and controlled manner.

There are two instances when it is particularly useful to initiate conflict. The first is when the offender doesn't realize that his or her behavior is contributing to a department conflict. For example, the secretary who is always late for work may not realize that coming late creates a problem because faculty need access to locked files and supply cabinets before going to first-period classes. The secretary may be conscientious about making up the missed time at the end of the day and unaware that her tardiness poses a problem for anyone. By intervening and pointing out that a conflict does exist, the department chair can prevent the conflict from escalating.

A second instance when a chair may need to initiate conflict is to help facilitate decision making. This could occur when evaluating a faculty member's progress toward meeting the standards for promotion and tenure. Sometimes untenured faculty get so involved in committee assignments that they neglect achievements in the areas of teaching and research. The chair can prevent a larger problem by initiating conflict early in the probationary period by making it clear that the faculty member is not likely to be recommended for tenure because he or she is ignoring two of the three standards for tenure. Done early enough in the probationary period, a faculty member has the opportunity to remedy the investment of his or her time and succeed in meeting all of the standards for promotion and tenure. If the chair does not initiate the conflict, the faculty member may not face the important decision of how to invest energy and time and the result could be a denial of tenure and promotion.

Recognize which conflicts are yours to manage . Fortunately, some conflicts are not the business of the department chair. One easy guideline for determining whether a conflict is the department chair's to manage is to ask the question, "Does the conflict affect the overall productivity or morale of the department?" If the answer is yes, management of the conflict is the responsibility of the department chair. A chair may have two faculty members who are also neighbors and who happen to be feuding over the location of a fence between the two properties. That conflict is not the chair's to manage unless

it escalates to a level where one or both faculty begin bad-mouthing the other to students. When the dispute damages department productivity, the conflict becomes the chair's to manage. It does not mean that the department chair becomes accountable for working out a solution to the placement of the fence between the two properties. It does, however, mean that the department chair must make clear that a neighborhood disagreement cannot jeopardize the academic department or interrupt the professional contributions of individual faculty to the department.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

In Case 1, "The Accusation," the department chair must manage a conflict between two faculty members. Dr. Marie Zaleznik, a tenured associate professor, demands that charges of unethical conduct be brought against Dan Peterson, an untenured assistant professor. Place yourself in the role of Dr. Ronald Schmidt, chair of the marketing department at Southern Hills University, as you read Case 1.

Case 1: The Accusation

Schmidt (outraged): "Those are serious charges you are making against Dan Peterson. You could be sued for slander."

Zaleznik: "I can only be guilty of slander if I am lying. I am not lying, and I can prove it. Nor am I making these charges lightly. Dan has consistently padded his credentials in a fraudulent way. You're not willing to look at the facts because Dan's the department's favorite son. You and the other members of the 'old guard' have always protected him."

Schmidt: "That's not true. Dan has done very well here despite having to contend with some overzealous colleagues. What possible basis could you have for making such an outrageous accusation?"

Zaleznik: "I'll tell you what I have found. As you know, this is my third year on the department's personnel committee, which means that I review the achievements submitted by every faculty member each year. The accomplishments forwarded by Dan Peterson each year contain fraudulent exaggerations. In the past he has claimed to have been a "guest lecturer" in classes where he was merely one of several faculty invited to attend a class to field questions. This year Dan reached an all-time low."

Schmidt (clearly uncomfortable): "I am not going to enter a discussion over semantics."

Zaleznik: "Dr. Schmidt, this is not a matter of semantics. It's a matter of ethics and accurate reporting. Dan also claimed that he made a presentation at national conferences when, in fact, his only role was to attend a meeting as a member of a caucus group. He's been doing these things for years, but now he's gone one step further. This year he claimed that he had a manuscript accepted for publication that I know for a fact was not accepted."

Schmidt: "How in the world would you know that?"

Zaleznik: "I'm a reviewer for the journal he listed as having accepted the publication and I checked with the editor. His manuscript was reviewed and rejected."

Schmidt: "What right do you have to check on something like that? Besides, maybe Danny intends to revise and resubmit it."

Zaleznik: "Maybe so, but he should not list the manuscript as having been accepted. You better look at the information I've compiled and be ready to take some action. If you're not prepared to restore an ethical standard in this department, I'll take this to someone who will."

LET'S ANALYZE THE CASE

The conflict described in Case 1 is multidimensional. There is the obvious conflict between Marie Zaleznik and Dan Peterson. From Zaleznik's perspective, Peterson fraudulently presented his professional accomplishments. A second conflict exists in Dr. Zaleznik's perception of the "old guard" and their favoritism toward Dan Peterson. Depending on the validity of the charges made by Dr. Zaleznik, the chair may also discover that Dan Peterson's actions are in violation of the campus policy on ethical conduct. That would pose a conflict for the department chair who is responsible for upholding university policy and preserving a sense of professional ethics within the department. It may also pose a problem for the department in complying with ethical standards set by the professional accrediting body.

The language used by Dr. Zaleznik suggests that the work environment in this department is not healthy. Zaleznik, and perhaps other faculty, perceive the existence of a double standard for evaluating and rewarding the accomplishments of faculty. Zaleznik clearly perceives the existence of subgroups within the department and the presence of favoritism toward at least one person. That makes the chair's task of managing the conflict more difficult because Zaleznik does not view the chair as objective. If the work environment were such that Zaleznik believed that the chair treated all faculty equitably, the chair could more easily manage the immediate conflict.

The chair's response suggests that Schmidt observed the growing rift between Peterson and some of the other faculty. Early in the conversation, the chair quips: "Dan has done very well here despite having to contend with some overzealous colleagues." If the chair perceived the growing animosity between Peterson and some of the other faculty, he could have intervened by demonstrating his objectivity in dealing with faculty. This might include course assignments, release time for research, committee assignments, allocation of travel support, and other decisions affecting faculty. Depending on the level of resentment, the chair might hold one-on-one conversations with those faculty who appear to be most convinced of a bias toward Peterson. The chair might also counsel Peterson on how to behave in the department and the importance of not giving colleagues an opportunity to perceive him as exercising any advantage. The chair in this case does not manage the encounter with Dr. Zaleznik very well. When Dr. Zaleznik accuses Dan Peterson of unethical conduct, the chair becomes defensive. By defending Dan Peterson without reviewing the information presented by Marie Zaleznik, the chair escalates the conflict. The chair is not objective about the complaint, and Dr. Zaleznik leaves the encounter with the impression that the chair will not investigate the charges fairly. The chair's defensive rhetoric actually substantiates Marie Zaleznik's belief that Dan Peterson is the old guard's "favorite son."

It is possible that Peterson doesn't understand the performance expectations. It is also possible that Peterson feels somehow pressured into making bolder exaggerations of his accomplishments. The chair may need to counsel Peterson on what is acceptable in listing accomplishments. If Peterson has overstated his achievements for three years with nothing but positive response in the form of praise and salary increases, he has little reason to do things differently. The chair's early intervention would have benefited Peterson and perhaps prevented the immediate conflict.

The chair must manage more than the immediate conflict. The chair's credibility with Marie Zaleznik and perhaps other faculty will be influenced by how he handles the charges made against Dan Peterson. In the event that the chair opts to protect Dan Peterson at all costs, he loses credibility with at least some of the faculty. To the extent that Dan Peterson is the "favorite son" of the senior faculty, the chair could lose credibility with the old guard should he fail to protect Dan from what may be perceived by them as a vicious and unwarranted attack. The chair's objective is to appear neutral as he reviews the facts and applies university policy regarding the standards for ethical conduct by faculty.

IT'S YOUR TURN

Review Case 1 and think how you would handle the initial meeting with Dr. Zaleznik.

1. How would you handle the accusation? What nonverbal action would you take to defuse Dr. Zaleznik's anger? Would you spend time in small talk, allowing her to cool off before the discussion continued? Would you remain seated behind your desk or take a chair nearer Dr. Zaleznik? Would you allow Marie Zaleznik to vent all of her thoughts and frustrations or interrupt the harsher statements?
2. How would you handle the conversation with Dr. Zaleznik? Underline the statements made by the department chair that you would rewrite. Anticipate Dr. Zaleznik's reaction to your rhetoric and the altered scenario. Would Marie Zaleznik leave your office believing that the matter would be reviewed objectively?

PLEASE CONSIDER

Probably the first deletion you made was the chair's statement, "You could be sued for slander." Marie Zaleznik could perceive this statement as a threat. At a minimum, it creates a barrier for a candid and open discussion. The statement implies that the chair does not wish to hear negative comments about Dan Peterson. When Dr. Zaleznik persists, the chair asserts that Dan has succeeded while contending with some "overzealous colleagues." That assertion escalates the conflict because it indicates that the chair is taking sides. Further, by labeling Marie Zaleznik's charges as an "outrageous accusation," the chair makes clear his disbelief of the information presented by Dr. Zaleznik. The chair demonstrates that he cannot be objective regarding the charges being brought against Dan Peterson. This only confirms Zaleznik's perception of favoritism.

Once Dr. Zaleznik presents some facts, the chair attempts to dismiss the entire discussion by saying, "I am not going to enter a discussion over semantics." The statement suggests that the information presented by Dr. Zaleznik will not get an objective review by Dr. Schmidt. The conflict continues to escalate when the chair blurts out that Dr. Zaleznik has no right to "check on" the accuracy of information presented by Dan Peterson in his annual achievement report. The fact that the chair follows this assertion with an inadequate rationale on Dan's behalf is further evidence of his bias. The chair knows that a rejected publication should not be listed as accepted even if the author intends to revise and resubmit it. At this point in the dialogue, the chair refers to Dan Peterson as "Danny," which further confirms Dr. Zaleznik's suspicion of the favoritism shown Dan Peterson.

Did you identify these comments as those that you would rewrite? Now that you've had some practice in neutralizing the conflict, let's make the case more interesting. Continue to assume the role of department chair, but add the following facts:

1. University policy allows for a faculty member to bring charges of unethical conduct against another faculty member with or without the chair's support.
2. Dan Peterson earned his baccalaureate and master's degrees in the marketing department at Southern Hills University.
3. Dan's grandfather was dean of the business college at Southern Hills University. The building that houses the marketing department, Peterson Hall, was named for Dean Peterson upon his retirement.
4. The Peterson family endowed a special speaker series and established a substantial scholarship fund.
5. Peterson was hired ABD (all but dissertation) on a contingency contract. The contingency clause stipulated that Dan Peterson must complete his doctorate before the end of the first nine-month contract to be retained on a continuing tenure-track appointment. Dan did not finish his doctorate, but the chair renewed his appointment without department discussion.

How would those facts alter your handling of the situation? Would the facts cause you to change your initial response to Dr. Zaleznik? Does the additional information alter how you would approach Dan Peterson? Would you inform the dean of the charges made by Dr. Zaleznik?

LET'S RECAP

Review your strategy for managing the situation described in Case 1. If your approach does not incorporate the communication strategies for minimizing destructive conflict, you may want to review the material presented earlier in this chapter on how to effectively manage conflict. Does your approach

- help establish and maintain a healthy work environment?
- clearly communicate your goals and expectations for faculty performance?
- establish (or follow already established) ground rules for airing disagreements?
- anticipate conflict areas and allow for intervention when needed?
- give consideration to when and how to confront conflict?
- give consideration to when and how to initiate conflict?
- recognize which aspects of the conflict are the chair's to manage?

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Dan Peterson did indeed exaggerate his accomplishments. Since learning of the charges, Peterson openly apologized for his actions. He even offered to take a pay cut in order to demonstrate to his faculty colleagues that he does not wish to benefit from work not done. Dan Peterson hopes that all may be forgiven. He enjoys living in his hometown and would like to retain his faculty appointment at Southern Hills University. However, sensing Marie Zaleznik's strong conviction that such unethical conduct should be punished, Peterson decides to apply for other positions.

Dan Peterson left a note in the chair's mailbox asking for a letter of recommendation. The position announcement attached to Peterson's request specifies that the applicant possess "professional integrity sufficient to serve as a role model for first-generation college students."

Dr. Schmidt elects to write a letter of recommendation for Dan Peterson. It is a difficult decision. He sincerely wants to help Peterson but doesn't know how to approach the task. Schmidt decides to write on behalf of Peterson because he believes that Peterson is an excellent teacher with a bright future. The chair believes that Peterson's career should not be ruined because of one isolated misunderstanding. Schmidt's letter of recommendation for Dan Peterson appears as Case 2.

Case 2: Letter of Recommendation

Dr. Kuei-Ning Lin, Chair
Department of Marketing
Superior College
Townsend, Utah 57802

Dear Dr. Lin:

I am writing this letter at the request of Dan Peterson whom I have known since he was a young child who would occasionally visit his grandfather, the former dean of our college. I was pleased when Dan enrolled at Southern Hills University (SHU) as a freshman in marketing. The faculty who had Dan in class remember well his excellent work as an undergraduate student. The department is proud that Dan also completed his master's at SHU.

Dan went to State University for his doctorate, returning each summer to teach for us at SHU. He is very loyal to this institution. Dan and his family have been both faithful and generous in their support of the department and the college. We were fortunate to recruit Dan for a tenure-track position as he neared completion of his doctorate.

For the past three years, Dan has taught full-time in the department. Students enjoy his classes. I have observed Dan teach on numerous occasions and find him to be an excellent teacher. He is very ambitious and takes great pride in his work.

In all candor, I sincerely wish that Dan Peterson did not need to leave SHU. I and many of my colleagues will miss him.

Sincerely,

Ronald Schmidt
Professor and Chair

LET'S ANALYZE THE CASE

Let's evaluate the letter presented as Case 2. The chair decides to write an evaluation without reference to the charges made by Marie Zaleznik. Instead, the chair mentions how long he has known Dan Peterson. It is clear that the chair likes Dan Peterson. It is also clear that the chair believes that Dan is an excellent teacher. This assertion, however, would be more credible if it were substantiated with some specific information that describes Dan Peterson's method of teaching. For example, the letter might mention some special ability such as his skill in fielding student questions or in teaching large lecture classes. The general way in which the chair praises Peterson's teaching does not provide the search committee with an assessment that enables them to determine if Peterson is the type of teacher needed at Superior College. As presented, the high regard expressed for Peterson's teaching is not sufficient to persuade the search committee that he is the best choice for the available position.

The overall tone of the letter suggests that the chair intends to be supportive of Peterson's application. However, the letter fails to cover many of the issues usually addressed. For example, there is no mention of how Peterson interacts with colleagues. There is no progress report on Peterson's dissertation and no explanation as to how the appointment at Southern Hills may have slowed Peterson's progress in completing the doctoral degree. There is no comment on Peterson's work in the areas of research and service. While Superior College may not have an expectation for published research, Southern Hills does. Hence, the search committee at Superior should want to know of Peterson's accomplishments in all three areas of faculty performance required at Southern Hills University.

Perhaps most damaging is the fact that the chair makes clear Peterson's longtime association with Southern Hills University. The search committee at Superior College will no doubt wonder why

Peterson is seeking a position elsewhere. The chair's letter raises the question without providing an explanation. The chair elects to avoid mention of the charges made by Marie Zaleznik. However, the chair's letter of recommendation raises a serious red flag by indicating that Peterson encountered some problem at Southern Hills that caused him to submit an application to Superior College. The closing paragraph admits that the chair wishes that Peterson did not "need to leave" Southern Hills University. If the search committee remains serious about Peterson's candidacy, they will want to pursue the reason he needs to leave Southern Hills. We are left to wonder how the chair would handle a telephone call seeking some follow-up comment on the letter of recommendation.

IT'S YOUR TURN

Think through how you would handle Dan Peterson's request for a letter of recommendation.

1. What is your ethical responsibility to Dan Peterson? What is your ethical responsibility to the department and the institution? What is your ethical responsibility to other programs in your discipline who might hire Dan Peterson?
2. Is it possible to write a letter that benefits Dan Peterson without selling short your ethical responsibility to the discipline, the department, and the institution? What can you say about Peterson that would be helpful in his search for another position?
3. Draft a letter of recommendation for Dan Peterson. Review it and determine whether what you have written would be helpful to Peterson's application. Does your letter fulfill your ethical responsibility to Peterson, the discipline, the department, and the institution? What follow-up questions might you be asked in a telephone call from a member of the search committee, and how would you answer them?

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Case 3, "Self-Interest," describes a difference of opinion held by two faculty members regarding how merit pay should be awarded. In this case, Katherine Sullivan, chair of the department of philosophy, has heard the opposing points of view so often that she can anticipate the dialogue that will unfold at an upcoming meeting. Place yourself in the department chair's role as you read the following case.

Case 3: Self-Interest

The Characters

Katherine Sullivan, chair of the department of philosophy, dreads the upcoming department meeting. The first item on the agenda is a review of the department procedures for awarding merit increases. Over the years, the department has become fairly proficient in its evaluation of faculty merit. The one remaining source of disagreement is how merit awards should be translated into salary increase dollars. Each year, the department receives a pool of money that is based on a percent of the total salary base of the academic unit. Hence, faculty at the rank of professor with larger salaries contribute more to the salary increase pool than faculty at more junior professorial ranks who earn lower salaries.

For the past three years, the department awarded merit as a fixed dollar amount rather than as a percent of an individual faculty member's salary base. Faculty are rated on a scale from zero to three and everyone receiving the same numeric score receives the same dollar increase. When translated to percent of salary increase, an assistant professor has a higher percent of salary increase than a full professor with the same numeric merit score. In fact, a professor deemed to be highly meritorious might receive a below-average salary increase.

Katherine recognizes that the current practice discriminates against senior faculty who in many instances have served the department and institution for 20 or more years. Further, it creates a salary compression problem in that the salaries of untenured junior faculty are rapidly catching up with the salaries of faculty who have 20 or more years of service in the department. The senior faculty carry the weight of directing graduate theses and dissertations so untenured faculty can devote more time to completing the research necessary for successful tenure and promotion review. Because the department cannot reach consensus on the issue, the matter is typically decided by vote. With faculty voting self-interest, the outcome is decided by the fact that the department is composed of seven untenured assistant professors, two tenured associate professors, and three tenured full professors. Katherine can predict how the discussion will go.

The Meeting

It didn't take long for the conflict to surface at the faculty meeting.

Sam Harris, a full professor, is the first to break the ice. "I believe it's time to consider another method for awarding salary increases. We have used the fixed dollar allocation for three years with great penalty to senior faculty. I propose that we begin using a combination model in which half of the salary increase awarded by the state would be allocated as a percent of salary base and the other

half would be distributed as a dollar amount. A combination model is the only fair salary increase plan because it does not penalize either senior or junior faculty."

"I'm opposed to distributing salary increases in any method other than a straight dollar allocation," snapped Jessica McClellen, one of the untenured faculty members.

"Won't you at least consider a plan that doesn't discriminate against either junior or senior faculty?" asked Sam.

"My merit should count the same as your merit. If you and I each receive a merit rating of three, we deserve the same dollar amount. It's only fair. There is no reason why your merit should count more," retorted Jessica.

"My 26 years of service should count for something," added Sam.

"Absolutely not! Why should you be paid for being older? Besides, your higher salary eats more of the summer budget so it all balances out. When it's your turn to teach in the summer, there are fewer summer appointments for the rest of us," Jessica added defiantly as though she had uncovered a serious inequity.

"But the years of experience possessed by senior faculty enable us to contribute in a different dimension. For example, we bear the brunt of directing graduate students, a selfless activity that takes us away from our personal research and..."

Before Sam could finish his sentence, Jessica interrupted, saying, "If I do the work assigned to me in a meritorious way, it doesn't matter what I do. My merit pay in dollars should equal yours. I contribute just as much as you do and my merit should not be worth one penny less than your merit."

By this time, Jessica is sitting taller in her chair and appears somewhat triumphant. She hastens to add, "I support a socialistic philosophy. I disapprove of any system that promotes classes among us."

"But the salaries of the senior faculty contribute more to the total salary increase pool. With the average salary increase of 4.5% this year, a full professor making \$50,000 will contribute \$2,250 to the department salary increase pool and an assistant professor making \$30,000 will only contribute \$1,350. If they both get the same numeric merit rating and a dollar increase of \$1,500, the professor's merit will represent a 3% salary increase, whereas the assistant professor's merit will represent a 5% salary increase. You benefit from the large contribution that the senior faculty make to the department salary increase pool. How is that fair?" asked Sam.

"It's perfectly fair in a socialistic system where there is not a caste system that separates. My contribution is as important as yours and should be worth as much as yours. It's quite simple," replied Jessica. Sam ventured one more thought, "I firmly believe that any model other than a combination model is divisive to the department because it is a model of self-interest. If Dr. McClellen was motivated only by her self-professed belief in socialism, she would also want all new assistant professors to have starting salaries that are not one penny less than the salaries of other more experienced assistant professors. Yet, I suspect that Jessica would oppose any plan that did not preserve her status over other more junior assistant professors." Jessica retorted: "I realize that the current practice of awarding merit in dollars benefits me because I'm a new faculty member, but that's not a reason to switch to a different system." Then with a chuckle, she added, "I may change my vote when I'm a full professor, but right now this is the right way to do it."

LET'S ANALYZE THE CASE

The department chair dreaded the department meeting because she could anticipate the dialogue that she would hear. It was no secret that there were at least two opposing points of view among department faculty about the awarding of merit salary increases. The chair is uncertain how to confront this conflict other than to have it rehashed periodically at a department meeting. As expected, the strong viewpoints regarding the issue surfaced during the meeting. All of the usual comments were made, and again the faculty could not reach a satisfactory solution or compromise. It seems that the only way to settle the matter is to take another vote, and the outcome is predictable. The faculty are unable to engage in a discussion about the method for awarding salary increases without advocating their own self-interest. Sam Harris suggests a compromise by using a combination model. Even this "compromise" alternative represents a method that would benefit Sam Harris more than the current practice.

Worse yet, the sentiment expressed by faculty becomes more acerbic every time they revisit the issue. The language used by the assistant professor, Jessica McClellen, indicates a deeply felt bitterness toward senior professors that extends beyond this one issue. McClellen perceives the senior faculty as limiting her opportunity for a summer employment. In her opinion, the senior faculty receive unfair benefit and the fixed dollar method of awarding salary increases helps to balance other inequities. It is not clear from the case whether there are legitimate reasons for McClellen's belief that inequity exists between the senior and junior faculty. It is possible that this one issue has been allowed to fester to the point where it has produced a rift between the senior and junior faculty.

The discussion presented in Case 3 gives us reason to conclude that the work environment is not as healthy as it might be. The faculty do not share a common vision of the department mission or priorities. Consequently, the faculty make decisions and vote from a personal bias to preserve self-interest. If the attitudes expressed are representative of those held by the group, then faculty at each rank are only aware of their own contribution to the department. Sam Harris mentions the extra time that the senior faculty invest in supervising graduate students, but this fact fails to convince Jessica McClellan who asserts that the more junior faculty work just as hard and senior faculty salaries take up a disproportionate share of the money allocated for summer teaching appointments. From Sam Harris's point of view, the heavier graduate student advisement load carried by the senior faculty gives the untenured faculty more release time for research activity. Each group believes that they are working hard to the advantage of the other group. This suggests that at least some faculty believe that the goals and expectations for faculty performance are not the same for all faculty.

The department chair allows the discussion to unfold as she predicted it would. Sullivan opts not to intervene in that portion of the discussion detailed in Case 3. The chair is not sure how to manage the conflict. She recognizes that the current method for awarding salary increases is unfair to senior faculty but cannot think of any way to initiate a change in the status quo. The chair's posture suggests that she believes that it is an issue that must be decided by the faculty. The chair could have intervened before the meeting. It is easier to change attitudes on salient issues in a one-on-one format. This does not mean that the chair should persuade all faculty to vote a certain way on an issue. Rather, a chair can intervene by helping individual faculty understand the perspective held by other faculty. The intervention can heighten sensitivity about how individuals interpret and assess the various viewpoints. The conversation might also explore the cost of the conflict to individual faculty and the department. That would help individual faculty put a single issue in the larger context of the department mission and priorities.

This department lacks ground rules for airing differences of opinion. The chair's silence through a lengthy disagreement suggests that the operating ground rule is that all can say whatever they please. One may be struck by how free at least one faculty member is to express personal opinion and prejudice. Particularly since the chair was able to predict the way in which the discussion would unfold, ground rules could have been used to break the destructive pattern. The chair, for example, might introduce the issue by acknowledging the frequently heard arguments and challenging all faculty in this year's discussion to move beyond arguments of obvious self-interest. The chair could stress the need for a department discussion and vote that is more responsible. The chair might also speak first on the issue and educate the faculty on the pros and cons of the current practice such as the growing problem of salary compression or the need to retain faculty. That would help the faculty consider the salary increase plan within the larger context of department priorities.

IT'S YOUR TURN

Assume the role of the chair and decide how would you manage this conflict.

1. What would you do in advance of the meeting to make the conflict more manageable? Review the discussion in Case 3. At what point would you intervene in the discussion? What would you say and to whom would you address your comments? Could you structure the meeting in a way that prevents a repeat of the dialogue that tends to fuel a larger conflict?
2. Does the dialogue impact the overall department climate? Should such differences of opinion between junior and senior faculty be decided by a vote? Is there more at stake than the issue of merit pay? Will the manner in which you manage this conflict influence your credibility with the faculty? How might this issue affect other department priorities?

PLEASE CONSIDER

The department chair will influence the outcome of this disagreement. Chairs cannot remain neutral on such disagreements. In Case 3, the department chair allows the disagreement to unfold as she knew it would without intervention. When managing conflict, the decision to remain silent is a response to the conflict and one that the faculty are not likely to perceive as neutral. It is clear from the dialogue presented in Case 3 that the faculty are unable to resolve the conflict on their own. Consequently, it is irresponsible for the chair to allow the conflict to continue to fester until it does further damage to the department climate and professional rapport among faculty.

Chairs can also prejudice the outcome of an issue through their management of the conflict. In Case 3, the chair recognizes that the current practice of awarding salary increases favors the more junior faculty who earn lower salaries. The chair, however, is unwilling to articulate her opinion. A credible chair could probably sway department opinion by offering the chair's view of what would be most fair. Without the chair's inserting a logic for weighing the pros and cons of the possible salary increase plans, the self-interest escalates in a way that can damage long-term professional relationships among faculty and destroy a positive work environment. The language used by Jessica McClellan, for example, illustrates a general disrespect for opposing points of view and an arrogance about arguing self-interest.

The dialogue in Case 3 depicts the department culture and offers some insight on the chair's management style. The chair is prone to let faculty decide issues, which is not inherently a poor management style. A chair, however, cannot let faculty decide the issue without managing the conflict.

It is the chair's responsibility to ensure that faculty present their various viewpoints in a professional manner and that faculty separate this one issue of conflict from their overall assessment of a colleague's worth. It is the chair's responsibility to help faculty advance substantive arguments that allow the department to weigh all sides of the issue. Only then can the department reach a workable solution or at least cast an informed vote. The chair in Case 3 permits the same disagreement to unfold repeatedly, thus increasing the likelihood that the issue of contention will escalate and absorb other feelings of resentment and ill will among faculty in the department.

It is virtually impossible for a chair to remain neutral while the faculty decide such serious issues as the one described in Case 3. Even when chairs prefer not to disclose their personal views on a particular issue, they need to manage the conflict so the faculty are more likely to reach a constructive outcome that does not harm the department by creating unnecessary animosity among faculty or toward the department chair. Please consider the impact that department chairs have on department conflict as you read Case 4.

Case 4: The Chair's Bias

Unofficial Meetings

Since the last department meeting, many of the faculty met with Katherine Sullivan to express their personal views on the issue of how salary increases should be awarded.

The first one to visit the department chair was Sam Harris. Sullivan discloses that she is uncomfortable with the current practice of awarding salary increases because it discriminates against the more senior faculty. Sullivan adds that it is unlikely that a faculty vote will enable her to change the current practice because senior faculty are outnumbered in the department. Sam suggests that the discussion might improve if the chair demonstrates the economics of a specific case, using each of the three possible salary plans: fixed dollar amounts, a percent of salary base, and a combination model. Sam hopes that this will help a majority of faculty understand that the combination model is the fairest in that it is the only plan that doesn't discriminate against either junior or senior faculty. Katherine agrees to present a hypothetical case to the faculty before further discussion of the issue. Harris leaves the chair's office believing that Sullivan empathizes with the senior faculty. Sam Harris informs the other tenured faculty of his conversation with Katherine Sullivan.

Katherine is also visited by almost all of the untenured faculty in the department, each pleading the case for using the current practice. The rationale presented by each ranges from the cost of groceries to why no one's work should count less than someone else's effort. Katherine Sullivan enjoys a good

rapport with the untenured faculty. In fact, Sullivan is more comfortable working with the untenured faculty than she is with the more senior faculty. While Sullivan enjoys the respect of both groups, the untenured faculty are in general less critical of the chair's management of the department. Also, Sullivan feels closer to the untenured faculty. She hired them and counsels them on their progress in meeting the department and university standards for tenure. Katherine listens to each untenured faculty member in the same supportive manner that the untenured faculty experience during performance evaluation sessions.

Round Two

The next department meeting moves along smoothly until the last item on the agenda, the salary increase plan. The department chair initiates the discussion by announcing that she has promised to bring an example of what each of the three possible salary increase plans would do to a specific salary. Sullivan quickly adds that she "dropped the ball" on this and just wasn't able to get it done.

The chair proceeds by offering a verbal summary of the three plans. "I believe that we are all familiar with the provisions of each plan. When salary increases are awarded by fixed dollar amounts, there is some benefit to the lower-paid faculty because the dollar amount of the increase typically results in a higher percent of salary base. If salary increases are awarded as a percent of salary base, then higher-paid faculty get more dollars. The combination model actually washes out the effect of merit because it cancels the benefit of either of the other two plans."

With that brief overview, the chair invites faculty comment. None of the faculty are quick to discuss the issue. Sensing the silence, the chair quickly adds, "If there is no discussion, I don't have any reason to change the current practice for awarding salary increases."

At this point, Sam Harris ventures a comment, "As you all know, I support the combination model because it doesn't 'wash out' merit but rather allows for the distribution of merit in a manner that does not penalize any particular subgroup of faculty. That seems to me to be a worthwhile goal in the interest of preserving good will among faculty in the department."

Jessica McClellan retorts, "How is my good will going to improve if I lose money? Any change from the current practice is taking money out of my pocket and I can't vote for that. After all, we are all expected to produce so why should we have a salary increase plan that favors high paid faculty?"

With this comment, many of the faculty sigh. Sullivan knows from her individual conversations with the faculty that many untenured faculty are uncomfortable with the way in which Jessica McClellan insists on turning the discussion into a personalized attack on senior faculty. Few of the

untentured faculty really believe McClellan's appeal to socialism or her charge that the other salary increase plans creates a caste system within the department.

Dave Johnson, the newest untenured faculty member, adds, "Well, what type of combination model would we use?"

The chair replies, "That is another issue. We could use any number of combination models between the fixed dollar amount and a percentage of base. We would have to look at the factors and decide how to weight each. If we end up weighting the percent of salary base more heavily than the portion that might be awarded as a fixed dollar amount, we have in reality shifted from the current practice to the percent of salary increase plan."

Sam Harris couldn't believe what he was hearing. He felt betrayed by the department chair and concluded that it was hopeless to make further comment. Obviously, the chair altered her position on the issue. Not only did she elect to renege on the promise to present some concrete examples, but she no longer expressed any empathy for the plight of senior faculty.

With no further comment, the chair closes discussion by saying, "Well, it looks as if there is no consensus to change the present practice."

LET'S ANALYZE THE CASE

The question of what method should be used to award salary increases has been decided. The department will continue to award salary increases as a fixed dollar amount, the plan that favors faculty with lower salaries. The department chair predicted that this would be the outcome of the faculty deliberation because, as she reminded Sam Harris, the untenured faculty outnumber the senior faculty.

The outcome, however, is not the result of reasoned faculty deliberation. The faculty discussion never gets past self-interest. McClellan's self-interest is obvious. It is doubtful that many, if any, of the faculty accepted her rationale as a bias toward a socialistic perspective. It is interesting to note that McClellan makes at least one untenured faculty member uncomfortable. We recognize the desire to dissociate ourselves from a certain position that we might otherwise endorse to avoid being grouped with those who are championing the position in an unflattering or unprofessional manner. As it turned out, Jessica McClellan did not have to say much because of how the chair presents the issue. Had McClellan needed to advance her position, she might have effectively altered the outcome by forcing some of the other untenured faculty to dissociate themselves from McClellan by voting for a compromise salary plan.

The department chair presents the issue in a way that places the need for advocacy with those faculty who want a change in the current practice. That leaves it to Sam Harris and other senior faculty to persuade the larger group of untenured faculty that the current plan that benefits lower-paid faculty most should be changed. The chair prejudices the outcome by framing the discussion this way. The department chair could present the issue as a need to examine the present system, giving full consideration to both benefits and liabilities. That would allow for a more even comparison of all possible salary increase plans. It also would distribute the need for advocacy to both proponents of the current practice and champions of change. In this discussion format, the department chair then would need to keep the discussion focused on substantive issues rather than personalities.

The department chair further influences the outcome by providing editorial comment about the three possible salary increase plans. There is never a clear comparison of the plans because the chair, as she said, "dropped the ball" and didn't prepare a hypothetical instance that would demonstrate what happens to a specific example under each of the possible plans. Instead, the chair offers an editorial comment on the three plans. Sullivan discounts the combination model when she asserts that it "washes out" merit. Without a concrete example, that statement is difficult to disprove or verify during a department meeting.

The chair also limits sincere debate and prejudices the outcome by signaling personal bias. The chair's intention is not clear. In both Case 3 and Case 4, Sullivan insists that it is an issue that must be decided by the faculty. Yet the issue was decided by the chair. Even at the close of the discussion, the chair insists that she is obliged to continue the current practice since there is no consensus for change. Everyone recognizes that it is an issue on which there is no consensus. By stating that it would take a consensus to change the current practice, the chair determines the outcome.

IT'S YOUR TURN

Assume the role of the department chair and think through how you would manage this conflict.

1. How would you handle the individual conversations with faculty members that took place between the two department meetings? What is your ethical responsibility to individual faculty when they are divided on an issue of department concern? What is your ethical responsibility to the overall department mission? Is the chair's ethical responsibility limited to casting a personal vote to break a tie when department faculty are split on an issue?
2. How would you frame the discussion at the department meeting? Review Case 4 and underline the comments made by the department chair that you would change. Substitute your language in the case and speculate how your approach would alter the outcome. Would your approach alter the attitudes held by faculty? Would your approach alter your rapport with faculty?

PLEASE CONSIDER

There is more at stake than whether or not the department retains the current practice for awarding salary increases. One precondition to the chair's ability to effectively manage conflict is a healthy work environment. The outcome of the current issue helps to preserve or alter the work environment that will, in turn, affect the chair's ability to manage the next conflict. If the senior faculty in Case 4 leave the department meeting believing that the chair betrayed them and prejudiced the outcome, their perception will influence future behavior. It is, therefore, less significant to know whether the department chair in Case 4 intended to prejudice the outcome than it is to understand how the chair's actions were perceived. Each conflict management task can either improve or weaken the chair's ability to effectively manage the next conflict.

The chair's credibility with the faculty is inevitably linked to how the chair treats them. In Case 4 it is understandable that Sam Harris felt betrayed. Harris would not be surprised by a faculty vote that upheld the current practice for awarding salary increases. In fact, Harris probably expected the outcome that was realized. What Harris did not expect was the chair's action. The chair had promised to prepare and present a concrete example that demonstrates what each of the possible salary plans does to a specific salary. In the meeting, the chair dismisses the promise in a blithe and casual manner that implies the request was somehow unimportant to the discussion. Further, by waiting until the department meeting to dismiss the need for concrete examples as unimportant, the chair prevents Sam from generating the examples.

Review your plan for managing the department meeting in Case 4. Would your approach preserve or enhance your credibility with individual faculty? Would your management of the department meeting preserve or bolster a healthy work environment within the department?

LET'S RECAP

Conflict is inevitable because it is a natural outcome of human interaction. If the department chair effectively manages conflict, the department actually benefits from the existence of differing viewpoints. The chair's objective is to manage rather than resolve conflict. Department chairs want to maximize constructive conflict and minimize destructive conflict.

The most effective way to manage conflict is to establish and maintain a healthy department climate. Faculty in healthy work environments are generally more supportive, cooperative, and accepting of change than faculty who work in negative department climates. Destructive conflict is less frequent in a positive work environment. Department chairs also facilitate the sometimes uncomfortable task of managing conflict by clearly communicating the goals and expectations for faculty performance and by establishing workable ground rules for airing disagreements.

The task of managing conflict involves more than arbitration. Chairs need to know when and how to intervene in order to prevent or minimize destructive conflict. Chairs sometimes need to initiate conflict in order to facilitate effective decision-making and preempt larger, more troublesome disagreements. The task of managing conflict is essential to maintaining workable and productive interactions and relationships within the department. Once department chairs understand the full benefit of managing conflict, the task becomes more comfortable.