MENTORING MATTERS: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

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Mentoring Defined

- The process of forming, cultivating and maintaining mutually beneficial developmental relationships between one or more mentors and one or more protégés.

- Developmental networks as a group of people who take interest in and action to support and/or advance an individual’s career, personal and/or professional development.
Mentoring Functions

- **Career Functions:** Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance “learning the ropes” and supporting the individual’s career advancement and professional development.
  - Sponsorship
  - Exposure & Visibility
  - Coaching
  - Protection
  - Challenging Assignments
Mentoring Functions

- **Psychosocial Functions:** Those aspects of mentoring relationships that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, perceptions of organization support and overall effectiveness in one’s professional role.
  - Role Modeling
  - Acceptance & Confirmation
  - Counseling
  - Friendship
Mentoring in Not a Panacea

- Eby & McManus typology of negative mentoring experiences include:
  - Exploitation
  - Egocentricity
  - Sabotage
  - Harassment
  - Interpersonal difficulty

- Research on other negative factors include:
  - Mentoring vs “cloning”
  - Unethical behavior (e.g., taking credit for work)
  - Boundary violations
Historically, experts viewed conflict as dysfunctional:

- Undermined relations
- Wasted human energy
- More job dissatisfaction, turnover, stress
- Less productivity, information sharing
Is Conflict Good or Bad?: 1970s-1990s View

1970s to 1990s – belief in an optimal level of conflict

Some level of conflict is good because:

- Energizes debate
- Reexamine assumptions
- Improves responsiveness to external environment
- Increases team cohesion

![Conflict outcomes graph]

Optimal conflict is at a moderate level, where the outcomes are the best. Low levels of conflict are considered bad, and high levels are also considered bad. The optimal level of conflict is where the relationship between conflict and outcomes reaches a peak.
Is Conflict Good or Bad?:
Emerging View

- Two types of conflict
  - Constructive conflict -- Conflict is aimed at issue, not parties
  - Relationship conflict -- Conflict is aimed at undermining the other party
- Goal: encourage constructive conflict, minimize relationship conflict
- Problem: difficult to separate constructive from relationship conflict
  - Drive to defend activated when ideas are critiqued
The Conflict Process

- Sources of Conflict
- Conflict Perceptions
- Conflict Emotions
- Conflict Escalation Cycle
- Manifest Conflict
- Conflict Outcomes
### Structural Sources of Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompatible Goals</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th>Task Interdependence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• One party’s goals perceived to interfere with other’s goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Different assumptions/definitions of mentoring</td>
<td>• Different values/beliefs</td>
<td>• Conflict increases with interdependence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explains cross-cultural and generational conflict</td>
<td>• Parties more likely to interfere with each other</td>
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## Structural Sources of Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scarce Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous Rules</td>
<td>• Motivates competition for the resource</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Lack of access to “closed networks”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Communication Problems</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Diversity dialogs (function, gender, race, generation, culture, level, tenure)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pressures for impression management</td>
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Five Conflict Handling Styles

- Forcing
- Compromising
- Problem-solving
- Avoiding
- Yielding
Conflict Handling Contingencies

**Problem solving**
- Best when:
  - Interests are not perfectly opposing
  - Parties have trust/openness
  - Issues are complex
- Problem: other party take advantage of information

**Forcing**
- Best when:
  - you have a deep conviction about your position
  - quick resolution required
  - other party would take advantage of cooperation
- Problems: relationship conflict, long-term relations
Conflict Handling Contingencies

Avoiding

- **Best when:**
  - relationship conflict is high
  - conflict resolution cost is higher than benefits

- **Problems:** doesn’t resolve conflict, frustration

Yielding

- **Best when:**
  - other party has much more power
  - issue is much less important to you than other party
  - value/logic of your position is imperfect

- **Problem:** Increases other party’s expectations
Conflict Handling Contingencies

Compromising

- Best when...
  - Parties have equal power
  - Quick solution is required
  - Parties lack trust/openness

- Problem: Sub-optimal solution where mutual gains are possible

**Key Question** – how does your conflict style enhance versus obstruct effective mentoring relationships?