

Conflict Management

An advisor can help the student organization deal with conflict in positive ways. Students come from different backgrounds, have different leadership styles, and different perceptions; therefore, it is important that group members identify and work through problems to balance the group.

What is conflict?

Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. Conflict is inevitable.

Beginnings of conflict:

- Poor communication
- Need more power
- Insufficient leadership
- Lack of openness among members
- New leaders take over

Conflict indicators:

- Body language
- Disagreements, regardless of issue
- Desire for power
- Increasing lack of respect
- Open disagreement

Conflict is destructive when it:

- Takes attention away from other important activities
- Forces groups to take side, which decreases cooperation
- Leads to irresponsible and harmful behavior, such as fighting or name-calling

Conflict is constructive when it:

- Results in solutions to problems
- Involves all members in resolving issues important to them
- Causes genuine communication
- Builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other
- Develops the individuals capabilities of understanding other's point of view

Managing Conflict:

1. Analyze the conflict: Decide what the nature and type of conflict the group is dealing with.
2. Once you have a general understanding of the conflict you are dealing with, determine the strategy to be used depending on the situation and with whom they are working with:

Conflict Management Strategies:

- **Avoiders:** Let tensions cool and then discuss
- **Accommodators:** Be reasonable
- **Competitors:** Talk about standards and expectations
- **Collaborators:** Solve joint problems
- **Cooperators:** Work on equal ground

3. Work out problems in small groups before the entire organization gets involved. Sometimes the officers can discuss their perspectives and give direction to follow.
4. Always take time to deal with conflict – even small problems can lead to an explosion that hurts the entire organization.
5. As an advisor, you need to balance negative comments with positive ones so that the group continues coming to you for advice.

Contact Campus Programming if you are interested in more information/activities regarding conflict management styles.