Conflict Management: Creating Healthier Work Environments

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Abstract

Conflict is frequently encountered in the veterinary profession. Conflict among the work team can create toxic work environments especially if issues are ignored or avoided. It can be difficult to know what to do or say when a conflict occurs, but learning techniques to manage conflict will create healthier work environments. In this workshop, you will learn about the most common conflict management styles and how to leverage them in various situations. You will have the opportunity to practice conflict management strategies in this interactive workshop so you will feel prepared to implement these strategies within your organization or workplace. Small group role play will be used to practice conflict management techniques using case scenario examples.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the benefits and pitfalls of the five conflict management styles
2. Compare perpetual and solvable problems
3. Implement conflict management strategies to successfully navigate conflict in veterinary settings

What is Conflict?

- Coworker or interpersonal issues are one of the most common practice-related stressors[1]
- Doctors who are bullied have increased stress, depression, and increased desire to leave medicine[2]
- Conflict occurs because of poor planning, lack of communication or miscommunication, tasks and roles are not clearly defined, scarce resources, competition, interdependence, values conflicts, interpersonal conflict, and personality differences.[3]
- Conflict is not necessarily wrong or bad.
  - Conflict can improve quality of decisions, increase innovation and productivity, stimulate discussion, builds group cohesion and cooperation, improve conflict management skills, and lead to individual development[3,5]
- Bullying and rudeness
  - Bullying impacts individual performance, creativity, flexibility, and results in decreased wellbeing.
  - Decreased team performance in diagnosis, treatment, team information and workload sharing[4]
  - Bullying often occurs because individuals are overworked, lacking of support, feeling that patient safety is compromised, hierarchy, and toxic cultures.[2]

Conflict Management Styles

- Avoiding- good for emotionally charged situations or trivial issues, but not helpful for most problems
- Competing- good for emergencies/safety concerns, but may hurt relationships or cause resentment
- Accommodating- makes others happy, useful for issues not important to your, helpful when you are wrong, vital at maintaining harmony, but others are unaware of your concerns and your needs are not met which may lead to burnout
- Compromising- finding a middle ground, but no one is completely satisfied
- Collaborating- understanding both sides, mutual win, but can take a lot of time

Conflict Management Techniques

Emotional Intelligence[6]

Ability to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and others

Self-awareness, emotional management, self-motivation, empathy, building relationships

PATIENCE, HUMILITY, CURIOSITY, AND RESPECT

Practice Mindful Listening During Conflict

Tips for Addressing Solvable Problems

If this issue is solvable and something that can be fixed, use the following framework:
1. Define the problem
2. Determine what is within your influence
3. Know your resources
4. Identify the barriers
5. Develop a plan of action
6. Reflect

Tips for Addressing Perpetual Problems

1. Adapt and get through the moment
2. Set aside a time to discuss the issue
3. Start with positive statements
4. Use I statements to express how you are feeling.
5. Connect the specific scenario to the bigger picture.
6. Communicate what you feel responsible for
7. Try not to take it personally
8. One formula for what to say in these moments:
     "I think this, what do you think now let's make a decision."
9. If it doesn't go well at first, don't give up. Consider taking a time-out from the conflict.
10. Ask when an appropriate time would be to discuss this conflict.

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