Conflict Resolution and Negotiation Skills

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Introduction

We, librarians are required to learn and utilise a range of skills to ensure that the library responds to the needs of our clients. Considering the high level of personal interaction we engage in on a daily basis, there are two specific skills we need to be aware of and use, Conflict Resolution and Negotiation.

We deal with people who are coming into the relationship with varying needs, backgrounds and value systems. In these situations, we must be aware of the potential for conflict whether it be obvious or just starting to fester. To ensure that it doesn't impede our work, we need to learn how to recognise a situation as a potential conflict, decide on the best resolution method to use and implement it.

In first half I'll focus on:
- the role of conflict in the workplace,
- sources of conflict and
- methods for managing/resolving conflict

In the second part, I'll be looking at negotiation skills we employ in our personal and work lives everyday. Some negotiations are short and straightforward while others require some preparation.

In this part of the talk I'll cover:
- preparing for negotiation,
- communication techniques to use during the process and
- the stages of negotiation and what they involve

While this talk won't answer all your questions about conflict resolution and negotiation. I hope it will provide you with insight into recognising a situation as a potential conflict or negotiation and dealing with it. Conflict is a part of our lives, there is no denying it. We may not encounter it everyday but it does exist and will arise at a moment's notice or develop over time. Your first thought might be that conflict is destructive but the opposite can be true. Conflict doesn't always signal doom, it can play a positive role in our work and personal relationships. Learning how to manage it can prepare us for change, help us to understand differences and help us in becoming a more effective member of staff. The best place to start is going through some myths and truths about workplace conflict.

Role of conflict in the workplace

Myths
- Conflict is disruptive - this can happen but when handled carefully, conflict results in goals being met

- If avoided, conflict will eventually go away - this is a common view. Small issues can be resolved in this manner. But other issues, if left alone, can fester into bigger problems - when you get right down to it - all conflict must be managed at worst and resolved at best.
- Conflict represents a communication breakdown - not really as some conflicts are generated because people tend to interpret an issue differently. In those cases, breakdown in communication plays no part in it. But when communication breakdown is the cause, conflict can provide the opportunity to clarify issues and reach a successful outcome.
- All conflicts can be resolved - if that were true, it would be a perfect world. Since we each carry differing emotional and cultural baggage, there will be times when a conflict can't be resolved but if addressed, it can be manageable
- Conflict always results in a winner and a loser - not true. If both parties desire a resolution than in all probability an answer will be found with a win/win result

Truths
- Conflicts will occur - that's a given, when different people are involved in active interactions. But the important question remains, what will you do when it occurs?
- Most conflicts can be managed - while not every conflict can be resolved, most can be managed. There are five approaches to consider: Competition (Win/Lose), Accommodation (Lose/Win); Avoidance (Lose/Lose); Compromise (Win-Lose/Lose-Win) and Collaboration (Win/Win)
- Conflict can help build relationships - In dealing with the differences that are important to you, it's possible to strengthen your relations with clients, peers and managers. Often, negative first impressions or bad feelings can be altered through these interactions
- Conflict motivates change - While dealing with a conflict, it's a good idea to examine yourself and identify certain behavioural characteristics in your communication skills which can help you change for the better

Sources of workplace conflict
In the workplace, there are two types of conflict - interpersonal and organisational. Of the two, interpersonal is more common and hardest to handle.

Interpersonal Conflict
Interpersonal conflict occurs when you value a situation or issue differently from another person. We each have a value system and it determines our priorities in the workplace.

Value system
Our value system is conditioned by different stages of our life - early childhood, school years, adolescence, early adulthood and significant events in adulthood. Our core beliefs are established during the first four stages and they become the centre of our value system when we enter adulthood.

While its harder to alter our core beliefs, there are some advantages to interpersonal conflict. We can be taught to appreciate a new perspective and modify our behaviour by identifying and admitting our personal feelings. Secondly, we are opening ourselves to further personal development and ideas regarding other people's abilities.

In the library environment, we deal with differing information needs/wants and value systems. Our ability to handle these differences becomes an important factor in maintaining a healthy interpersonal environment and satisfying our users.

Organisational conflict

As opposed to interpersonal, organisational conflict is a byproduct of the changing dynamics within a structure. If not addressed quickly, these dynamics can lead to conflict.

Sources of organisational conflict are:
- change - whether internally (changes to policy, procedures) or externally (law, economics) driven
- clashing goals and objectives - a result of poor communication and planning between departments
- limited resources - means competition between departments eg. lack of space, not enough staff, budgetary constraints, outdated equipment etc
- domino effect - when one department's activities directly impact upon another. Usually a result of poor planning and communication breakdown

As illustrated above, communication breakdown can be a cause of organisational conflict. In such cases, it is up to upper management to ensure that communication is ongoing. For a librarian, the main task is maintenance of communication between our management and clientele. It will make a difference to how our service is perceived and its survival.

Methods for managing conflict

Now that you know the sources of workplace conflict, the next step is how to handle it. What approach will you use. In conflict resolution and negotiation there are five established methods and depending on the circumstances, each method has its use.

Competition (WIN/LOSE)

This approach is used when one side is trying to exercise complete dominance of the proceedings. The objective is to win the person over to your position.

Common characteristics of competition are:
- the ability to argue the issues
- one party has a certain rank within the organisation eg. higher level manager
- economic sanctions
- coercion and force

Appropriate uses
- When quick decisive action is needed
- When an unpopular decision needs to be implemented
- When used as a last resort in resolving a longstanding conflict

Accommodation (LOSE/WIN)

This approach shows you are willing to yield your position. It is usually associated with nonassertive behaviour. It can also signify an unwillingness to resolve the conflict.

Appropriate uses
- When it is vital to preserve the relationship
- When the issue is more important to the other party
- When a degree of reasonableness needs to be indicated
- When encouraging others to express their point of view

Avoidance (LOSE/LOSE)
This approach can be used in a positive and negative manner. In the negative, it signifies you're unwilling to cooperate or are in denial of the problem. It places you in a weaker position and leaves the other party without a solution. The result is that both parties leave the meeting dissatisfied. But when used in a positive way, it gives both parties time for a breather and regrouping.

Appropriate uses
- When others can handle the conflict better
- When both parties see the issue as minor
- When the impact of the situation is too negative for both parties
- When additional time is required before a resolution is possible
- When both parties need time to cool off

Compromise (WIN/LOSE - WIN/LOSE)
This approach involves tradeoffs, swapping of ideas/solutions, flexibility for both parties, finding a common ground to resolve the issues and finally, negotiation (which will be covered later)

Appropriate uses
- When seeking a common ground from each party's competing goals
- When achieving temporary settlement in complex matters
- When a solution is needed because of limited time
- When maintaining personal objectives while preserving the relationship

Collaboration (WIN/WIN)
This is the ideal but most difficult approach to use. It establishes a climate where each party can understand the other's point of view. It involves identifying areas where agreement and differences exist, evaluating alternatives and selecting solutions. For it to be successful, it requires the support and commitment of both parties.

Appropriate uses
- When preserving important objectives while maintaining the relationship
- When merging the feelings and experiences of people with different perspectives
- When both sides are willing to explore alternatives together
- When attempting to get at the unresolved root problems

Now that you know about the above methods - I need to highlight that being aware of these approaches is the half of it - the real question is how you will read the situation and which method you will use to resolve it. That is the deciding factor in successfully resolving the conflict and maintaining your relations with the other party.

Communication methods
When using any of the above approaches - you should also keep in mind how you plan to use communication in facilitating a resolution. I have included three models which can guide you in handling certain conflicts.

Six Step Model
The Six Step Model is best used when dealing with an organisational conflict eg. a problem has arisen between you and the Admin Dept concerning the shared use of the PC with Internet access.

A - define the conflict - state what you think is the problem
B - analyse the situation - who is involved; what happened; where did it occur, why, how
C - generate alternatives - brainstorm possible solutions
D - project results of each alternative
E - select and agree on the alternative
F - implement and evaluate

DESC Model
The DESC Model is best used in interpersonal conflict and only when the problem has become very serious. eg (you have set in place a series of procedures for clients when they are accessing confidential information but there is one client who is repeatedly not following them)

D - describe the situation - be specific
E - express your feelings
S - specify what you want to happen
C - consequences - emphasise the negative and positive results
Whenever you plan to use this model, plan your strategy beforehand - it can prove to be a delicate situation.

AEIOU Model
The AEIOU model is effective when dealing with different levels within an organisation eg employee to boss, peer to peer (you have noticed that your new manager is continually checking up on you and asking to see your monthly statistics)

A   assume the other person means well
E   express your feelings - state your concerns
I   identify what you would like to happen - propose changes which could take place
O   the outcomes expected - emphasise the positive expectations for both of you
U   understanding on a mutual basis - the aim is to get an agreement, if not a compromise

Whichever model you use here are some questions to ask yourself when planning your strategy:

- how is the person going to react?
- what do you think will be the greatest point of resistance?
- when is the best time to approach the person?
- what will the benefits be for them?

Negotiation

Negotiation is a process which exists in its own right or is used as one approach to conflict resolution. We use it everyday in our interaction with clients, managers, suppliers etc. Often, it will be swift but at other times the process requires forethought eg. discussing next year's budget, purchase of new equipment and resources

Types of negotiation

Negotiation falls into four areas:

- Industrial - awards, enterprise agreements, collective bargaining
- Financial - takeovers, assignments/deals
- Commercial - purchasing, selling, contracting
- Human Resources - management, decision making, discipline, performance

Preparing to negotiate

To ensure your position throughout a negotiation is stable, there are points you need to consider while preparing :

- the style and behaviour of the other party when approaching the negotiation eg are they competitive or co-operative
- the style and behaviour you intend to use
- the authority and power of both parties
- the range of interpersonal skills you will need to conclude the negotiation
- the outcomes you wish to achieve - the position you want to settle in and your bargaining range - the range you decide on must be realistic and flexible
- the climate of the negotiation - physical environment and timing and
- the communication techniques to be used

Communication techniques

As with conflict resolution, communication is a critical part of negotiating. Often the final outcome can rest upon the other party's emotional state of mind. In all negotiating, all parties will be acting in self interest, will tend to avoid making a decision for as long as possible and will want their views heard.

So, while you are negotiating, consider these techniques:

'I' Messages are effective for

- summarising the situation, keeping control/regaining control and showing your feelings about the situation

Signalling
- using verbal and non verbal signs to indicate your agreement/disagreement or shifting position

Reframing
- is used to clarify the issues being negotiated, provides a better picture of the situation, summarises the issues at stake, requires active and reflective listening, signals to the other party your eagerness and attention to their feelings and ideas.

Sensitivity statements
- illustrate your understanding of the other party's position, can be used to bypass irrelevant issues that are thrown in to waylay the process - use the 'I' messages eg. I believe, I understand

Stages in negotiating
Now that you have decided upon your approach and tactics, it's important to know the formal stages in the negotiation process.

Presentation
You should establish your most favoured outcome and bargaining range. At this stage you listen, ask open questions, signal, summarise, be responsive and assertive.

Preparing
Map out the issues you wish to discuss and their value. This will define the bargaining stage and all the possible outcomes are put forward. At this stage you can agree without conceding, seek room to move, link ideas and the issues, ask the whys, why nots and what ifs, use firm language and acknowledge the differences between the parties.

Bargaining
At this stage you can summarise the issues signal the concessions, reframe the issues,
- focus on the problem, think creatively, keep your options open and value your concessions in the other party's terms

Closing
To close the negotiations you can summarise issues, concessions and the rewards offer the concession to seal the deal offer the 'or else' and offer the 'either/or' option.

Conclusion
In the above, I have given you the various components of identifying and dealing with conflicts and preparing for negotiations. While this information can help you recognise a situation as a conflict or negotiation, remember that you will be dealing with a person who has a different value system and behaviour to you.

To ensure that you have a successful outcome, you need to recognise these differences, know the person/party you will be dealing with and the situation at hand. You don't need to be an expert in conflict resolution and negotiation, just being aware of the above factors

can impact on your behaviour, attitude and approach when interacting with your clients, managers, subordinates and peers.

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ABTAPL now has its own website, which can be accessed at
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(extracted from BULLETIN of ABTAPL Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1998)

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Theological libraries in New Zealand / Barbara Frame.

Increasing the overlap : an introduction to the work of the Librarians' Christian Fellowship / Graham Hedges

Multi-faith information resources : Religions in the UK and *Multifaithnet* Paul Weller

And a note on :
Index Islamicus : this bibliography of publications on Islam and the Muslim world, covering worldwide literature from 1906 to 1996, is now available on CD-ROM, produced by Bowker-Saur.