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Conflict Management for HDR supervisors: Mindset and Approach

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Overview

- Fred and Mary discussions
- The concept of conflict in supervision
- Definition and mindset of conflict
- Conflict escalation
- Conflict prevention
- Conflict management styles/ strategies
- Working with a scenario
- Managing the “conversation” around conflict
- Practical steps for managing conflict – Summary

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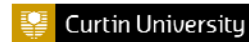
Supervision of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Students Policy

1. PURPOSE

To ensure that supervisors provide **a role model** to Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students **that is positive and conducive to a research culture of excellence, integrity, professionalism and mutual respect.**

Values: Integrity, Respect, Courage, Excellence and Impact

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Fred and Mary

- Fred is the supervisor, Mary is the student
- Fred group: chat about what is important to Fred as the supervisor
- Mary group: chat about what is important to Mary as the student

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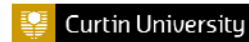
Fred and Mary

Discuss in your groups:

- What makes a good supervisor?
- What makes a high performing researcher/supervisee?

- What are the inherent challenges in supervision relationship?

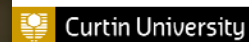
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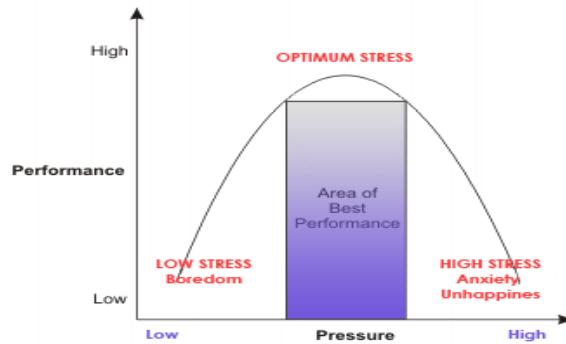
Conflict

What is your definition of Conflict?

*Tension created in interaction between people
In the gap between people's perceptions, values,
personalities and needs*



Balancing Performance and Pressure*



The Goldilocks Principle

*Based on Yerkes-Dodson Law, 1908

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Benefits of conflict

- Test positions and beliefs
- Improve the quality of decisions
- Create energetic climate
- Increase productivity, creativity and innovation- “flow” zone
- Trigger for change
- Facilitate employee engagement and growth
- Build more synergy and cohesion among teams
- Enable better understanding and intimacy in relationships

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The Escalation Ladder of Conflict (Glasl, 1996)



Parties goals no longer confined to winning but also to destroying

Exchange of harmful blows

Crisis

Loss of face and personal attacks
Threat become strategic, groups forming around positions

Development of tactics including search for power sources

Dispute

Difficult communication

Polarisation of positions, emotional charge

Conflict

Diversity of Thinking: Gap in perceptions, points of view, expectations, styles

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Conflict: prevention

What can we do to prevent conflict escalation?

- **Value Diversity and Diversity of Thinking-** Know who you are working with and what are their talents and limitations
- **Clarify and manage expectations and rules of engagement in advance**
- **Normalise and anticipate conflicts** as natural part of human interaction and agree on how they should be resolved- Discuss the “What Ifs”
- Create agreed **conflict management guidelines-** Conflict Management System

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Create and maintain trust and sense of safety



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What is Conflict Management System? (CMS)

- *“Conflict management systems attempt to channel conflict in productive directions, not just to manage its resolution.”* (Lipsky, Seeber and Finch 2003, 9).

Guidelines for establishing the HDR supervisory relationship

- Think in your group of the various challenges and potential conflicts inherent in supervisory relationship
- Think of 5 open ended questions to explore with a new HDR student in relation to conflict management?
- Create guidelines to assist in managing these conflicts early and constructively?

Gabbard states:

“the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that a supervisee would be most likely to keep secret from a supervisor or consultant are the most important issues to discuss with that supervisor or consultant.”

What could you as a supervisor do to increase trust and sense of safety?

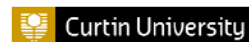
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Conflict Management Strategies*

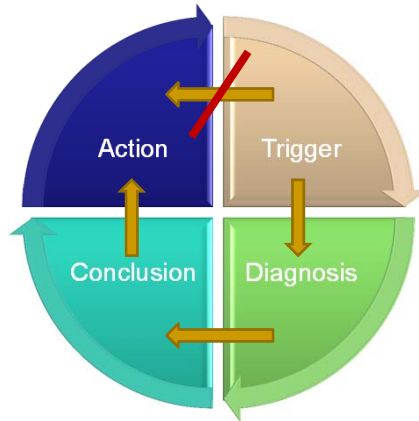


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* Thomas and Kilman, 1975

The Action- Reaction Cycle



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Conflict: management

Guiding principles of conflict management

- Work to resolve conflicts early and at the lowest appropriate level- manage tension rather than crisis
- Communicate effectively
- Focus on learning and understanding
- Apply the right CM strategy for the right situation
- Strive for negotiating acceptable resolutions together
- Use the appropriate Conflict Management System and seek support and advice

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Conflict management tools: Difficult Conversations

- Opening a conversation

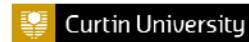
I statement: Describe the situation

Describe how you feel about it

Ask – what can we do about it?

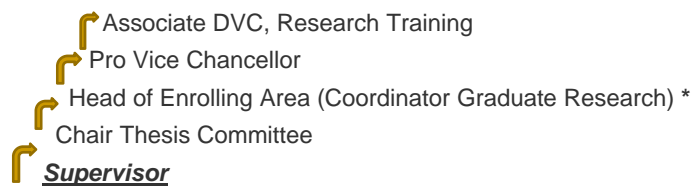
- Enquiry – LACE – Listen, Acknowledge, Check, Explore
- Transparency- Share your story with courage and without blame
- Negotiation – find the common ground and work together to develop options for the future
 - Ask : What do you suggest?
 - Brainstorm on several possible solutions
 - Agree on the criteria to evaluate/ select the solution
 - Reach a clear commitment

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Conflict: management

- Lowest appropriate level

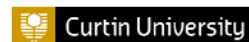


→ Complaints handling process at Curtin (ISU)

→ Ombudsman

* Seeking the advice and services of the conflict management consultant is highly recommended.

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Summary

1. Be clear about expectations, rules of engagement and boundaries
2. Create accepted norms and systems regarding communication and CM based on anticipated issues/conflicts
3. Encourage trust and safety
4. Talk about problems/tensions- they are normal part of the process- Earliest opportunity
5. Be mindful of the outcome that you're hoping for in a conversation and ask yourself - what you would like to learn?
6. Manage yourself and your emotions – Buy time if you are feeling defensive or angry
7. Demonstrate respect for the other person, particularly when you disagree
8. keep in mind that you are required to act in accordance with the values and Code of Conduct at all times, independent of how unreasonable the other person might be
9. **Seek support!!**

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Resources

- Conflict Resolution and Equity Services
eesjservices@curtin.edu.au 9266 7914
- Counselling Service
- Human Resources Business Consultants
- Injury Management
- Colleagues

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