Healthy group conflict

It is difficult to find a group of individuals that doesn’t have any type of conflict. Remember that every organization faces conflict during its development. Dealing with the conflict will make your organization more successful than avoiding it. Here are some concepts that might be helpful to move you out of the storming stage.

Be Timely
- Schedule a meeting to allow for a brief cooling-off period.
- Address the conflict right away or soon after it occurs.
- Don’t wait too long to address the conflict or the opportunity will be lost.

Have a Plan
- Think about your interests and motivations.
- Think about their interests and motivations.
- Plan word choices to avoid miscommunication.
- Practice phrasing things in “I” statements.
- Think about what maybe truly at the root of the conflict.
- Separate the person from the problem.

Listen and Communicate Actively
- Listen without interrupting.
- Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Paraphrase and ask for clarification.
- Remember that “intentions are nothing, perceptions are everything.”

Provide Closure
- Work together to brainstorm options for mutual gain.
- Use objective criteria for evaluation; make agreements specific and measurable.
- Be sure that all parties are in agreement with the outcome.
- Follow up on the resolution.

Our mission is to support, challenge, and inspire Colgate students to become responsible, thoughtful, and engaged citizens.

This brochure is part of a series that is an integral component of our endeavor to fulfill our mission. We hope that these are helpful to you. If you have suggestions for additional subjects please let us know.

“Success is a journey, not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome.” - Arthur Ashe

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Guide to Group Development

One of the joys and challenges of participating in a student organization is the opportunity to work with other people. Each member has a different personality, communication style, interests, and reasons for being involved. It can be difficult enough to negotiate these differences one-on-one, but the challenge is multiplied when a large number of people are involved. Learning to successfully handle the dynamics of your group can be a valuable skill that will be applicable now and in the future in all areas of your life. Use these elements to your advantage, and the organization will ultimately benefit.

What are some things I can expect from a group?

Most organizations go through a series of changes as they develop and the members learn to work together. It is sometimes hard to remember that these challenges are normal and actually will be helpful in the long run. You can probably identify these four stages in any group of which you have been a part (for example, organizations, class projects or theses, and co-workers). It's valuable if you can step back and identify what is happening and then move on with your goals. Organizations may go back and forth between stages as they gain new members and face new types of activities.

Forming

This is the shiny, happy time in the group when everyone is excited about being part of the organization. People are getting to know each other, developing relationships, and learning about the group and its goals.

Storming

When the honeymoon is over and people are more comfortable with each other, conflict may begin. Individuals may have trouble communicating, may be testing limits with each other, may notice others’ flaws and quirks, and may challenge the leadership of the group. Make sure you all deal with problems at this stage, or you might get stuck here and be unable to move on.

Norming

Have no fear – things will smooth out as roles are defined and group members learn how to work together. Morale comes back as individuals learn how to communicate and earn each other’s trust.

Performing

After all this work, you’ll attain a level of productivity and problem-solving. Leadership is shared, individuals are interdependent, group members work together to achieve goals, and members enjoy working together.

What are the signs of group effectiveness?

- Objectives and goals are shared widely by members.
- Leadership is flexible.
- Everyone’s opinion matters.
- Members do not ignore seriously intended contributions.
- Members check to make sure they know what a speaker means before commenting. Group members can save time and many misunderstandings if they clarify before attempting to discuss the topic at hand.
- Each member speaks only for him or herself and lets others speak for themselves.
- All members participate, but in different and complementary ways. (For more information on this topic, see the brochure on Group dynamics.)
- When group members sense they are having trouble getting work done, they try to figure out why.
- Individuals in the group trust each other.
- The group members bring conflict into the open and deal with it.

More information about these signs is available on the CLSI website. Information was obtained from the following sources:

University of Wisconsin, Stout. “Leadership: We cannot do without you!”
Judy Pfeffer. “Diagnosing your Organization.” (Presentation handouts)