



CAME Voice/Voix

Building conflict resolution skills

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Who we are influences our judgments of others and our response to conflict - a key feature in how we manage personal and professional relationships. Dealing with conflict requires self-awareness and good communication skills. Opportunities to build skills in conflict resolution are not traditionally available in health professional settings. We have developed workshop-based techniques to allow participants to engage in a conflict scenario and explore various conflict resolution skills and communication techniques in a protected facilitated environment. Attribution theory is introduced within this context as a theoretical frame to help participants understand perceptions and judgments related to collegial tensions and dispute.

Attribution Theory suggests that individuals may differ in their causal explanations regarding the behaviour of others. Negative attributions are often the source of many personal and professional conflicts between colleagues. Studies indicate that individuals are inclined to measure their own behaviour as *situational* in nature while attributing *dispositionally* to the behaviour of others. An individual arriving late for a team meeting might defend his behaviour as unavoidable due to heavy traffic (situational) while his colleagues are more likely to attribute his tardiness to general laziness or disorganization (dispositional). Both these attributions are based on a causal assessment of whether this behaviour is controllable or uncontrollable. Traffic jams are events beyond one's control but laziness and disorganization are perceived as controllable behaviours that one should be able to change. Uncontrollable events and behaviours elicit a more sympathetic response while controllable events and behaviours elicit an unsympathetic, judgmental response.

We have used these techniques in workshops around the world and for a range of professional disciplines and interprofessional groups that include architecture, law, business, human resources and medicine. Participants report enhanced communication and conflict resolution skills. They have also reported that live simulation is integral for practical skills development. The use of simulation intersects with key experiential learning principles of discovery and transformation through practice. We continue to develop this work and learn from participants and their professional contexts.

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See the following for more information www.collegialconflict.ca or Knickle K, et al.: Beyond winning: mediation, conflict resolution, and non-rational sources of conflict in the ICU. Viewpoint, Critical Care 2012, 16:308. <http://ccforum.com/content/16/3/308>