

scholarship, even in institutions other than research universities, chairs can change departmental culture so that it values scholarship. A suggested initial, achievable goal for chairs is increasing average research productivity by 10 percent for the department.

Chairs can also set a goal of involving faculty in a fair share of the work of the department. However, they must assign the work of the department fairly, selecting the most appropriate decision-making style (unilateral, consultative, or participative) for making assignments and exercising restraint in assigning tasks to new, minority, and women faculty. A further suggested goal is that chairs discuss with faculty how much emphasis should be given to service activities as listed by the scholarly organization representing the departmental discipline.

Chapter Eight

Team Building Through Supportive Communication

The last three chapters about the chair's role as faculty developer have explored many specific ways in which chairs can evaluate departmental culture and make it more conducive to achieving both faculty and departmental goals. Now we return to the kinds of abilities that make chairs effective leaders of the department. Excellent communication skills, some understanding of small-group dynamics (particularly facilitation skills used in conducting meetings), skills in motivating others, and conflict management skills are the major abilities needed in a good team leader. In this chapter, the focus will be on communication and small-group dynamics. Chapter Nine will explore conflict management.

Creating a Supportive Communication Climate

Most department chairs have well-developed communication skills in several areas. Having mastered the intricacies of their particular academic disciplines, they know how to provide information handles for students, communicating what is difficult in a way that makes it easier to understand. Many are also successful in communicating to others some of the enthusiasm they feel for their subject. Moreover, most chairs are highly effective in critiquing ideas, and the majority are impressive as they make oral presentations before groups.

Listening Actively

However, communication skills do not end with giving effective, well-organized lectures, being facile of mind and tongue, and

pinpointing the flaws in another's argument. Well-developed leadership skills include the ability to listen actively. As noted earlier, an active listener has the capacity to summarize and paraphrase what he or she has heard, in order to check for accuracy of understanding. By using active listening, chairs strive to understand the speaker's ideas, problems, and emotions, expressed either verbally or nonverbally, as if the chair could view the situation from behind the eyes and ears of the speaker. An accurate understanding of what has been communicated is the first step in active listening, the next step is conveying to the speaker an ability and a willingness to see things from the speaker's point of view.

Any message has two components: the content and the feelings or attitudes that underlie the content. Speakers usually give us cues about their feelings through such nonverbal communication as facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, eye movements, breathing, pauses or hesitation in speech, and inflection and pitch of voice. In some instances, feelings are far more important than the content of what is said. As listeners, chairs should ask themselves, *What is the faculty member trying to tell me? What does this mean to the faculty member? How does he or she see the situation?*

Because understanding another person is far more difficult than it appears to be, it is important for chairs to check constantly to see whether they are able to comprehend the world as the faculty member views it. Understanding can be checked by repeating in the listener's own words what the speaker seems to mean.

Many individuals lack good listening skills. Often, people make a quick judgment in terms of whether they agree or disagree with what is being said. While the speaker is still talking, the listener stops paying attention and begins to mentally rehearse what he or she will say when the speaker pauses for breath. Judgmental listeners may also interrupt or complete the speaker's sentences, assuming that they already know what the speaker is going to say. Judgments may be made about the motivation behind the speaker's

words or nonverbal communication, and advice or solutions to problems may be offered. Although proposing an answer to another's problem may seem like a decent human thing to do, many people talk about their problems not with the intent of asking for solutions but simply so that the listener will understand that the speaker is in pain. The speaker merely wants the listener to know what it is like to walk in the speaker's shoes. Faculty may complain about the low academic skill level of students so that a chair will understand their difficulty in teaching undergraduates. New faculty may tell a chair how busy they are in hope that the chair will appreciate how hard it is for them to find the time to write. If a chair's style has been to provide solutions when people come with problems, it will be instructive for that chair to experiment with paraphrasing what speakers have said. If they seem happy that they have been understood, a chair will know they do not want him or her to solve their problems. However, if they ask what they should do, a chair can suggest that they look at certain options or help them generate alternatives themselves so that they maximize their choices.

Simply summarizing what has been heard sometimes feels like a passive activity and may initially sound artificial to a chair. However, paraphrasing does not necessarily mean repeating a laundry list of every single item uttered or behavior observed. If a chair sees someone slam a desk drawer, clench his or her fists, pound on a file cabinet, and yell, the summary might simply be, "You're really angry!" And if the response is an emotional, "You're right. I'm furious!" the chair knows that he or she is on target. The speaker, recognizing that the listener understands the feelings the speaker is experiencing, is then often able to move on to identify the problem and solve it.

However, there are occasions when a complete listing of items might be an appropriate form of active listening. Listing everything is one way for the listener to ensure that he or she has understood instructions. For example, in September, the dean tells the chair

that, for budgetary reasons, a report will be needed that includes separate calculations of the number of full-time and adjunct faculty members required to cover classes for the following academic year. To be certain that the report will be accurate, a chair might list aloud the factors he or she will have to consider to draw up the report, saying to the dean, "You want a report that will be based on an estimate of the number of courses the department will offer at on-campus locations, at off-site locations, in the Saturday College, and in both graduate and undergraduate programs. In that case, I will need to know whether the number of hours for research release time will be increased, decreased, or held constant; whether the requested sabbaticals will be approved; whether the denial of continuation for one of our faculty members will be supported; and whether we will be permitted to offer courses in the spring for the new program in human resource management that has just been approved." This may trigger the dean to say, "You will have to make judgments based on your best estimates, and that is acceptable." The chair then has a clearer idea of what the dean expects. A simple rule of thumb is that when summarizing emotions one can be very brief and very accurate; whereas when paraphrasing instructions that are not entirely clear a detailed summary may be necessary.

Active listening demonstrates respect for the speaker, because it conveys that the listener is interested in the speaker and thinks that what he or she feels is important. This is sometimes called being totally present to another person, and it is a rare experience. Even when two people talk who have not seen each other for a while, one is often looking over the other's shoulder to see who else might be passing by. Active listening also displays respect for the speaker's thoughts, without trying to change them. Moreover, such listening shows that the listener wants to understand the speaker and that the listener is the kind of person to whom the speaker can usefully talk.

Only after faculty members feel a chair truly understands their problems is it possible for them to enter a problem-solving mode

with the chair. And implicit in the active listening approach is the belief that people are capable of solving their own problems. If the chair immediately jumps in to offer a solution to a faculty member's problems, the faculty member's perception is either that the chair does not truly understand the complexity of the problems, if the chair thinks the solution is so obvious, or that the chair must think the speaker is stupid because he or she could not come up with a solution when it is so apparent. Moreover, when a chair tries to solve a faculty member's problem, the person usually feels no investment in the solution or commitment to follow through on it. As a result, the person finds some reason why the chair's solution cannot possibly work in this case. It is admittedly very difficult for a chair who feels that the problems presented by faculty are really simple ones to exercise restraint and to take the time required to lead faculty to generate options, select the most viable alternatives, and apply them in the problem situations.

Empowering Others

One effective intervention a chair can use in building a strong department is to empower faculty to implement some of the creative ideas they themselves have. How does a chair do this? By knowing that having the chair really listen to what faculty are saying is a truly affirming and empowering experience for faculty. When a faculty member presents an idea, the chair can listen and ask such questions as, *What would that look like? How is that different from what is the case now?*

Next, the chair encourages the faculty member to perform a gap analysis, asking this series of questions: *What would it take to get from here to there? What action steps would you need to put in place? How will you monitor your progress? How will you evaluate what you have accomplished? How can I help you to do that?* Faculty can be very creative. Often, all they need to move on in their thinking is someone to listen to them in a way that affirms

the value of an idea and helps them add an element of reality to it. The chair can do this for them.

Some chairs are reluctant to engage in such conversations because they feel faculty will ask for resources the chair cannot provide. However, faculty usually know when financial resources are scarce, and they are not necessarily expecting a chair to provide project funding. But faculty do usually want to know that the chair thinks their ideas are good ones, that he or she is willing to take faculty seriously by asking about action steps and outcomes assessment, and that he or she has confidence in their ability to go ahead and do what they have discussed with the chair.

Being Supportive

Developing good communication techniques, using active listening, and empowering faculty are skills that both create a supportive departmental climate and help it to flourish. In this climate, faculty are flexible and look for new and better ways of accomplishing their work. Individuals are challenged and thrive. Creativity is unleashed. In a supportive climate, chairs visit faculty offices frequently. It is not enough for a chair to have an open-door policy. Only a few faculty members will drop in. Those who do not often say, in voices tinged with accusation, "My chair has never stopped at my office just to chat. He or she has never asked me how my research is coming or how my classes are going." Many faculty members look for someone who will manifest interest and concern about their professional activities. Unfortunately, they often do not tell chairs that that is what they want. They assume that if chairs are interested, they will initiate conversations with faculty about what faculty are doing. This assumption that chairs will be forthcoming may be particularly true among difficult colleagues.

A department chair can create a supportive communication climate that leads to understanding and problem solving or a defensive climate that creates barriers and impedes finding solutions to

problems. The story of what happened when Matt Kincaid, a faculty member, took over the job of setting up a program for faculty development is a good example of a defensive climate in a university. Needing a desk, Kincaid was authorized to go to an office furniture store owned by two alumni who supposedly discounted prices to the university. At the store, Matt asked the price of a desk he liked and was told it was \$450. He then took out his business card and a university purchase order and asked what the price would be for the university, only to be told that he had already been quoted the discounted price. Kincaid felt he would rather spend the money in his budget for faculty grants than for office furniture, so he went to an estate clearance house. He saw another desk he liked for only \$150, and he knew he could also save the delivery fee because his brother would help him load the desk on top of his station wagon. However, when Matt presented all this information to the officer at the university to whom he reported, the response he got was, "Matt, do you think you know more than our purchasing department?" This kind of reaction to faculty effort creates a defensive communication climate! It discourages initiative and requires that all decisions be made from the top down. Although Matt did finally purchase the desk for \$150 and deliver it to the university himself, he felt that his good will and strong motivation had been somewhat diminished by bureaucratic procedures.

One of the most important themes in a defensive climate is control. In a defensive environment, a critical judgmental attitude overshadows working conditions: the individuals in charge feel certain they are right; departments are run autocratically; people are manipulated and what they say and do is often distorted; there is little personal support for faculty and their problems; and department members are made to feel inadequate. In a defensive climate, chairs continually formulate theories about faculty problems and think they have a pretty good idea, based on their own knowledge and experience, of what faculty must do to get back on track in their personal and professional lives. These chairs unilaterally set

goals for faculty and a plan of action the chairs feel will be constructive. They share with faculty only their completed diagnoses of problems and recommendations for change. Although one might think such conditions could happen in industry but not in academe, this is hardly the case, and most educators are aware of autocratic chairs in whose departments faculty keep a low profile and do the bare minimum, morale is poor, and creativity is obliterated.

The dominant themes in a supportive climate are sharing and understanding. In a supportive climate, chairs attempt to understand faculty members' problems and respect their feelings and values; creativity and risk taking are encouraged. Chairs attempt to define problems rather than offer solutions. Communication with department members is clear and accurate; information is not withheld, nor are there deliberate attempts to deceive (Costigan & Schneider, 1984, pp. 112-113). In a supportive climate that encourages communication, faculty opinions are accepted as legitimate points of view (even when there is disagreement over the reality of a situation), and whenever it seems appropriate to do so, chairs present their own perspectives as another point of view worth considering. Team leaders often participate in formulating short-term steps faculty can take to achieve goals. Chairs of such departments present themselves to faculty as individuals faculty can talk to and as individuals who are willing to work to get department members back on track when that is necessary, as opposed to being ready to coddle and defend faculty members against criticism from the administration even when the criticism is warranted. At the same time, the chair is usually eager to act as a strong advocate for the department and stand up to the administration if necessary. Moreover, in a supportive climate, accusation and blame are minimized. When something does go wrong, instead of criticizing individuals, chairs use a problem-solving approach that looks at policy and procedures to discover how mistakes can be prevented in the future.

In quality departments in which faculty members operate as a

high-performing team, feedback is valued as crucial to professional development. It occurs in a climate of trust, where the giver and receiver of feedback both recognize its value. Basic ground rules for the use of feedback are presented in Chapter Ten. However, in terms of creating a departmental culture that is supportive of feedback, a chair's responsibility is to build trust so that feedback is not misconstrued as harmful criticism. The chair also provides a model for receiving feedback by asking for feedback for himself or herself in a variety of specific contexts. As he or she models behavior, the chair should avoid defensiveness after receiving feedback and ask only questions intended to clarify the observations offered. The chair's openness in sharing information and ability to treat all faculty members in an equitable manner also create trust. When there is a greater allocation of resources to one faculty member than another, the chair clearly specifies the criteria for that decision.

Good communication that is accepting, nonjudgmental, and does not make assumptions about the other person's motivation is a necessary part of interpersonal effectiveness. When communication includes an awareness of what nonverbal messages individuals are sending to others, when there is consistency between the verbal and nonverbal message, when people are respectful of others, and a supportive climate is created, trust is established. Positive feedback is given naturally and frequently, so that faculty members feel that their accomplishments are recognized and encouraged by the chair. (Chairs might set goals for themselves of giving at least two people positive feedback every day.) The departmental culture is positive and encourages ongoing professional development.

Stages of Group Development in a Department

Much of what has been discussed so far has focused on interactions between the chair and one faculty member. Chairs also need skills for handling faculty in groups, understanding how groups develop

and the behavior that can be expected at different phases in the life of a group.

When an individual assumes the role of chair, the department becomes, in effect, a new group, which must go through the stages all groups pass through before becoming fully effective as teams. This is true even when a department has been made up of the same faculty members for years, although the fact that group members have been working together all along will shorten the time it takes the group to become a fully effective team. The stages of group development are forming, storming, norming, and performing. When a chair is elected and a new group forms, members begin to redefine their goals and develop procedures for carrying out their tasks. Since faculty do not know whether having a new chair will change the way they have been doing things, they often keep feelings to themselves until they know what to expect, are often unusually polite to one another, and are tentative in their relationships as they test the water. This forming stage is what is often referred to as the chair's honeymoon period.

At the second, or storming, stage, friction arises over how tasks should be performed and by whom. Procedures for functioning together are dealt with, often indirectly, sometimes abrasively. The group tries to agree on objectives and develop the way the group will operate. Faculty members may be concerned about how much change the new chair is going to put in place and whether the new chair will exercise more control than the last chair. For example, in one department, the former chair had never written a memo but conveyed all information to the faculty orally, through the secretary. The new chair, wanting to use a more direct channel for keeping people informed, wrote memos about relevant material, placing them in faculty mailboxes. Faculty then complained about getting too many memos from the chair and recommended that all notices be placed on a bulletin board instead. The chair agreed and used the procedure faculty recommended. However, when several people missed a meeting they wanted to attend because they had for-

gotten to look at the bulletin board where a change in time had been posted, they displaced their anger onto the chair for not notifying them personally about the change. Much of the conflict at this second stage has a similar element of irrationality about it. Conflicts about leadership and goals are dominant themes. Some faculty members may withdraw and isolate themselves from the resulting stress and tension. In the department described earlier in which several faculty members complained that they could not sleep the night before or the night after a department meeting because of stress, the department found that disagreement erupted at meetings but took the form of personal attacks instead of debates over issues. In another department, a chair discontinued department meetings because of the stress they generated. This chair avoided conflict, but the key role that an effective chair plays during this stage is to manage the conflict, not suppress it or withdraw from it.

In the third, or norming, stage, the group collects and shares information, accepts different points of view, develops the rules (or norms) by which group members will solve problems and make decisions, and begins to develop cohesion. Cooperation and positive expressions of feeling towards one another predominate among group members. But this is also the time when dysfunctional behaviors of individuals can become established if the group accepts them. For example, two faculty members in one department continually arrived late for meetings and then demanded that any decisions made by the group before their arrival be voted upon again if they disagreed with the action taken. When the chair and the group permitted such conduct rather than confront it, they reinforced the unacceptable dysfunctional actions, which continued unabated at future meetings.

At the final, or performing, stage, the group becomes an effective, cohesive group of individuals who perform their functions well. Faculty become aware of member strengths and begin to operate on the basis of rules that were determined at stage three. When

issues such as who will take which roles, what procedures will be used, how problems will be resolved, and how decisions will be made have been clarified earlier, the group can function well. However, some groups never resolve the issues of stages two and three and continue storming, tolerating dysfunctional behavior and arbitrarily applying rules for the rest of their existence or until the negative norms have been confronted and changed. If destructive conflict in a department has continued over a semester or two, it often helps to bring in an outside process consultant to assist department members in working through their strife so they can function well together.

Conducting Effective Departmental Meetings

Meetings can enhance collegiality and be used to exchange ideas, solve problems creatively, and set goals in a participative fashion. Meetings can also waste time, provide a medium for information better distributed in writing, and be occasions for suppressing disagreement, exacerbating hostility, alienating faculty, and rejecting people whose points of view represent a minority. Because so much academic work and so many academic decisions occur at meetings, all members of the academic community ought to be familiar with the following basic information for conducting effective meetings.

Planning for Meetings

There are some planning basics that are conducive to successful meetings. Selecting and reserving a room, having coffee available, and arranging chairs in a U-shape with a chalkboard or flip chart at the open end of the configuration are important, though easily neglected, parts of the planning phase. Many departmental meetings are held in a classroom with rows of theater-style seating, an arrangement that sends the message that the chair will lecture and the faculty members will listen and that sets a mood that is not

conducive to dynamic interactions. If chairs have doubts about this, they will find it useful to experiment by trying a different seating arrangement and observing how interactions change.

Preparing the meeting agenda also requires planning. A chair should begin by sending a memo asking for items to be placed on the agenda. Even if only one or two people respond, the message to the faculty is that they have a chance for input. When the chair draws up the final agenda, next to each item, he or she indicates the time to be allocated to discussion and the results expected: for example,

Item 3. Complaints from adjunct faculty about low attendance in undergraduate classes (10 minutes).

Results expected. Several recommendations on how this attendance problem can be handled.

Usually, agenda items should be listed in order of importance. However, the item listed first may also be one that can be decided quickly. The latter format provides an opportunity for quick success, setting the stage for tackling more serious or controversial issues successfully.

Checking on Meeting Effectiveness

The chair normally leads departmental meetings, and he or she may want to use a meetings audit form periodically, to discover participant satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different aspects of the meeting. This is another way for the chair to get feedback that can be used to develop leadership skills. A meetings audit simply requires that faculty list two or three items that they liked about the meeting, two or three factors that they disliked, and two or three ways the meeting could be improved. Each attendee then rates each of his or her items on a continuum from 6, "a great deal

of satisfaction," to 1, "relatively little satisfaction" (Baker, 1982, pp. 52-54). A standard meetings audit form can be prepared and used at meetings as often as the chair feels the technique will be useful. After taking an audit, it is helpful for the chair to share the results with the faculty at the next meeting and ask for their advice on changing those meeting aspects that people dislike. Conducting audits of meetings is another way of sharing responsibility with faculty for holding successful meetings. If faculty have an opportunity for input and are encouraged to view having successful meetings as partially their obligation, planning and conducting effective meetings becomes everyone's assignment. It should be a team function.

Another intervention helpful in improving the effectiveness of meetings is called stop action. This strategy allows meeting participants to detach themselves from the content of a meeting in order to look at what is happening between individuals. If a meeting seems to be going nowhere, or if individuals are making personal attacks instead of sticking to the issues, the chair simply calls, "stop action." Next, the chair asks faculty to disengage themselves from the meeting, share their observations about what is going on among participants, and ask if that is what they want to be doing at this point in the meeting. A chair needs to be patient with this intervention, since faculty members often have difficulty disengaging themselves from the content, particularly when emotions are high or when they are not yet skilled observers of meeting dynamics, or process. The stop action intervention may also be attempted when group involvement is minimal, and the chair wants to discover why many people are silent about a topic the chair thought would engage all of them. Such an intervention heightens awareness of meeting dynamics and encourages openness and discussions about change that faculty would like to bring about.

Task and Leadership Functions in Groups

For a group to function effectively, attention needs to be given to two roles for which both the group leader and members have

responsibility; these roles are the task and maintenance functions, or behaviors. Task roles achieve the goals for which the group is organized. Although the issues discussed at departmental meetings may change from month to month, they all deal with handling the concerns of the department. Maintenance roles contribute to the group's being in good working order and deal with small-group relationship dynamics, that is whether all individuals feel respected by the group, have a sense of inclusion, and feel free to express their opinions.

Task roles include carrying out the functions of the *initiator*, who defines problems and suggests strategies for solving problems; the *clarifier*, who clears up confusion; the *summarizer*, who pulls together related ideas; and the *consensus seeker*, who checks with the group to see how much agreement has been reached. Maintenance roles include carrying out the functions of the *harmonizer*, who attempts to reduce tension and reconcile disagreements; the *encourager*, who accepts others and their contributions; and the *gatekeeper*, who facilitates the participation of others. Meeting participants should also be aware of such individual roles as the *blocker*, who is stubbornly resistive and negative; the *recognition seeker*, who boasts and acts superior; the *dominator*, who tries to manipulate the group; and the *avoider*, who resists passively. Although these roles were first described in 1948 by Benne and Sheats, the same language has been used by many writers in the intervening years to describe the various ways people function in groups.

Unless a chair pays attention to the dynamics of group functioning and the task and maintenance roles, attempts to achieve group tasks will bog down. Further, when decisions are reached, there will be little commitment to them on the part of those who feel their opinions were not taken seriously, and these same faculty members will be unwilling to work to implement decisions that were made or to accomplish departmental goals. Since many chairs complain that they cannot get faculty to do their fair share of the work of the department, they might look at the way decisions are made and goals set to discover whether they have used a process of

participative decision making to develop commitment. If some faculty do not participate in discussions at meetings, chairs should poll their views directly, realizing that these faculty members need to be listened to.

Until department members become skilled in small-group dynamics, at which time all members become responsible for task and maintenance functions, the chair may want to assign some of the responsibility for effective meetings. A chair can demonstrate interest in productive meetings by asking two faculty members to be accountable for task and maintenance functions. The assignment of the task leader during the meeting is to record information on a flip chart and keep track of assignments and after the meeting to prepare and circulate minutes. The task leader also assists participants by summarizing points of agreement, helping participants decide what approach they will use to solve a problem, reminding them not to criticize during the idea generation stage of brainstorming, helping them keep on the topic, and trying to get closure when there is little disagreement but people are talking a lot. The maintenance or relationship leader tries to keep abrasive members from alienating themselves from the group by paraphrasing what they have said or asking them to explain or elaborate on a point they have made. In addition, the maintenance leader tries to ensure broad participation by bringing quiet members into the discussion. Since silence often means disagreement rather than agreement, everyone needs to be given a chance to express an opinion. When faculty members are silent, looking at them as another individual speaks, occasionally nodding or smiling, includes them and makes it easier for them to contribute.

Chairs can rotate the task and relationship responsibilities among faculty members from meeting to meeting. Such assignments will pique the interest of group members, and the responsible faculty members' reporting back to the group at the end of the meeting will also supply feedback to the participants on their role in discussions. Obviously, this is an important time for the chair to

ensure that the climate is supportive, with more positive than negative feedback furnished.

Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

The tasks addressed at departmental meetings generally have to do with implementation of the departmental mission, and the goals and objectives that flow from that mission, though faculty members may not view what they are doing as necessarily related to any formal mission statement. The specific meeting topics will vary as members of the department focus their attention on increasing their resources or managing cutbacks, so they can live within a reduced budget; recruiting students and faculty; evaluating the curriculum (which includes developing new programs and phasing out others); developing and reviewing standards for admission and evaluation of students; encouraging ongoing professional development for faculty; enhancing faculty scholarship, however it is defined by the department and the institution; mentoring of new faculty; and evaluating faculty for personnel decision making. These issues are a few of the many that absorb the time and attention of department members.

In addition, on occasion, seemingly unimportant issues can create emotional turmoil in a department. One such problem for a large management and marketing department was the allocation of office space. Many chairs have experienced something similar to this as they redistributed space when new faculty were hired, when other disciplines were combined with theirs to form new departments, or when their departments moved to new quarters. A factor such as office space may take on an exaggerated symbolic importance, particularly when faculty members feel that they are unappreciated and have not been given enough recognition in the department or that they have been treated badly and want past injustices to be eradicated.

The management and marketing department had been split

between two different campuses of a university, teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses at both campuses, but as the result of a strategic planning committee's recommendations, the entire department was directed to move to one campus. Two years earlier, department faculty had been assigned offices in several different buildings because there was not enough room in any one building. Several faculty members were angry at that time, and were still angry, because they had been assigned, arbitrarily it seemed and without consultation, to offices that were too cold in the winter and extremely hot and without air conditioning in the summer. Assistant professors had sometimes been given large offices; full professors, small offices. Some of the office furniture was shabby; wooden desks with deep gouges in their tops were distributed without regard for any discernible criteria.

So, when it was announced that the department would be relocated to the new site, with more adequate space so the faculty could all be together in the same building, the important question became how office space would be assigned this time. It had been rumored that some of the new offices would have windows and some would not, and there was concern that this disparity might not be taken into consideration. Some faculty members argued privately that rank and seniority should be the basis for assignment of space. However, the chair had been heard to comment that productive junior faculty should be given prime space to encourage them to remain with the university. The issue was not discussed publicly until a faculty member raised the question at one of the few departmental meetings called by the chair. In response to the question, the chair indicated that who occupied which office was not important and that he did not expect faculty to engage in petty fights about the topic. Afterwards, several faculty members stated privately that they would be reluctant to express their points of view after the chair's comments.

When problems like this remain undiscussed, further undercurrents of dissatisfaction will appear in a department. If the chair

makes a decision without involving the faculty, none of them will be satisfied. Characterizing disagreement about the problem as nothing more than a petty squabble may keep faculty quiet for a while, but anger will smolder below the surface and may erupt in unexpected ways.

Although serious tensions already existed in this department, a straightforward problem-solving approach with an outside facilitator was used without difficulty to resolve the issue of office assignments.

The first step was to encourage faculty to describe the current situation, which simply meant identifying the symptoms of the problem. The first symptom faculty described was their dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of office space under the current arrangements. Faculty spent time discussing the extreme heat and cold of their offices, the personal physical and medical problems that made some offices particularly unsuitable, the shabby furniture, the way the offices were spread among several buildings, the fact that faculty had had no input into assignment of space, and the fact that they were not sure what criteria were used in space allocation.

Their lack of input and uncertainty about allocation criteria identified an important part of the basic problem. Defining the problem is a significant part of the problem-solving process. Moreover, the way in which a problem is formulated will determine the answers that are generated. When a problem is formulated as a how-to step, that formulation usually creates greater objectivity among those who must find solutions. The goal of any formulation is to put the problem "out there," so that the group is able to work collaboratively in problem solving rather than competitively, with some individuals trying to convince others that a single position is the correct one. The management and marketing faculty could now develop a clear definition of the problem with which everyone could agree. They determined that the problem was how to allocate office space so that faculty are satisfied that an equitable process and fair criteria have been used.

Next, they were asked to generate alternative solutions to the problem. In many situations, a group chooses a solution to a problem too quickly, both because it seems as if it might work and because group members are eager to reduce the tension that problems generate. However, an early solution may not be a good choice because the group has not explored the full range of options open to it. So, a strategy is needed to prevent the group's choosing from a limited number of options. One easy and effective way to accomplish this is to ask group members to brainstorm solutions, generating as many options as they can think of. The ground rules are that, during the idea-generating stage, all suggestions are written on a chalkboard or flip chart and no one may make any positive or negative comments about any alternative suggested. No suggestion may be regarded as foolish, since seemingly unworkable ideas may trigger creative thinking in others, and maximum participation is thus encouraged because participants know their suggestions will not be criticized. Some of the alternative criteria generated by the management and marketing faculty for allocation of office space were rank, seniority, rank and seniority together, sex (females get first choice), medical or physical problems, productivity, years in the department (new faculty get first choice), amount of time typically spent in the office, a smoking habit (smokers get offices with windows), and previous service as department chair. Faculty also suggested holding a lottery, making trade-offs (first choice goes to those who handle certain undesirable service activities or those willing to give up travel money for three years), rotating offices every two years, and bidding on offices (based on what faculty would exchange for the best offices).

In the next step, faculty identified three or four of the most viable options and considered the advantages and disadvantages of each one and the probable effect on the rest of the department. Two alternatives emerged as preferable choices: rank and seniority together, which would solve some problems since there were a number of full professors, and a lottery, strongly urged by one asso-

ciate professor who felt that too much fuss was being made about office space. During the discussion, one new junior faculty member said he felt uncomfortable because, under the current arrangement, he had a better office than most of the senior faculty, and he was perfectly satisfied that senior faculty have the offices with windows. That comment seemed to influence the group. Finally, consensus developed and the criterion chosen was rank and seniority together.

The meeting could have ended here, but since problem solving also requires that the solution be tried for a period of time and then evaluated, faculty decided to try this approach for three years. After two years, the chair would poll the department to discover how well the arrangement was working and whether anyone wanted to make any changes. If not, the criterion of rank and seniority would remain in effect. At the end of the meeting, there was considerable joking about the process they had used and the decision they had made. But faculty left the meeting quite satisfied with the fact that their input was being taken seriously and that they had determined the criterion that would be used.

The steps that appeared in this example can be simply summarized.

Identify the symptoms. Define the problem.

Generate many alternatives.

Consider the pros and cons of the most viable options.

Select an alternative everyone can live with.

Experiment by trying this solution for a designated period of time.

Select one or more people who will accept responsibility for reporting back to the group on how well it is working, evaluating its effectiveness in terms of specified criteria.

If the solution works or can be tinkered with to make it work, agree to continue it for an indefinite period.

The purpose of problem solving is not for individuals to win points but to find the best possible solution to a problem. The role of the chair is to help faculty understand the problem-solving process, to enlist their aid in making it work, and to experiment with its use until faculty become good problem solvers. All of this sounds deceptively simple. However, academicians are an independent group and enjoy divergent thinking, so agreement may not be reached easily. Also, many decisions affect different faculty members in different ways. When a particular decision is made, some gain but some lose. Input for problem solving and decision making cannot be wholly objective. The chair's goal, then, must be to have decisions made fairly and with the best interests of the department as well as of the individuals in mind.

There are times when faculty discuss a problem and all of its ramifications extensively yet are unable to come to agreement about the best way to handle it. Nonetheless, some decision has to be made. For example, say that faculty in a psychology department made up of culturally diverse experimental and clinical psychologists must decide how to use a gift of \$5,000 given directly to the department by a grateful alumnus. The *nominal group technique* is a good choice of strategy in such a situation because the faculty making the decision together have very different priorities, and some are usually reluctant to express their points of view at meetings. Since the nominal group technique requires participation from everyone and ignores differences in specialization and background, it can be an effective way of decision making in many situations.

The technique requires that each faculty member write three or more possible solutions to the problem on separate pieces of paper. This step ensures the choice of a wide range of options. The chair collects each slip of paper as it is written, shuffles the paper to establish anonymity, reads each solution aloud to stimulate group members' thinking, then transfers the information to a chalkboard or flip chart, generating a list of solutions. At this point any items that some faculty do not understand are clarified. Then, each individual

ranks what he or she considers to be the best three options from the master list, giving the most preferred the highest number. A first-place vote is worth three votes; a second-place vote, two votes; and a third-place vote, one vote. If a clear choice emerges on the first round, that solution is accepted. If there is no strong agreement, the ranking is repeated until a clear preference does emerge. Since all faculty members will have had an opportunity to present their ideas (without concern that they will be perceived as advancing a procedure that is best for them) and to vote, this method helps break a stalemate and is usually viewed as fair by the group.

The nominal group technique is a good strategy for leveling the playing field and including the thinking of all faculty when, because of differences in rank, seniority, productivity, or ethnic background, some are reluctant to express ideas. Although this method of decision-making does not develop the total commitment that comes with striving for consensus, it has the advantage of including all points of view and is particularly useful when groups cannot reach consensus. Because everyone participates in the idea generation stage, it is different from ordinary discussion and voting, in which some group members will typically be silent, participating only in the voting at the end. For additional information on the use of the nominal group technique, chairs will find P. C. Nutt's *Making Tough Decisions* (1989) a good source.

Decision-Making Styles

The chair's attention to the process by which decisions are made in a department is important. Many departments vote on most decisions, with a simple majority winning. Although this is a very democratic procedure, the minority feel excluded and will often undermine decisions reached, passively dragging their feet when actions need to be taken. One department with which I consulted was so conflict ridden, still at the storming stage after years of having the same chair and the same faculty, that the chair decided all

of their meetings would be conducted according to *Robert's Rules of Order*. Although *Robert's Rules* is fine for a faculty senate in which a large number of people come together as a recommending body, it is not generally useful when the number of participants is reasonably small. There were only eighteen faculty members in this department. Typically, after issues had been voted on, people who lost felt angry, and the telephones were very busy after each meeting, with each small group expressing strong criticism of the behavior of the other small groups. The department became more and more fragmented, and voting as a method of decision making seemed only to make things worse. A team-building intervention helped them select more constructive methods of decision making and conflict resolution.

In addition to using the nominal group technique, chairs can use seeking consensus as a way to minimize fragmentation. Consensus is not the same as unanimity. Unanimity occurs only when everyone is in agreement about the course of action to be taken. In decision making by consensus, people have the opportunity to express their views and to try to persuade others. When this method is used effectively, individuals really listen to what is said, do some paraphrasing, and understand all points of view. The group reaches consensus when one point of view is preferred over the others. Under these circumstances, those who disagreed initially are often willing to go along with the rest of the group and accept commitment for carrying through on the decision. The pivotal points are trust that the group is taking the position it does for the well-being of the department, not for selfish interests, and the understanding that everyone's views are listened to and respected, even if the group disagrees with them. The major advantages in seeking consensus are that it enhances group cohesiveness and increases commitment to decisions. The biggest disadvantage of reaching consensus is that it is a time-consuming process—some wag once suggested that, when a group operates entirely on the basis of reaching consensus, all meetings should be held with par-

ticipants standing up. Therefore, chairs must be selective about which issues are worth this investment of time.

Of course, the chair may also make unilateral decisions. The advantage is that a decision can be made quickly, and this style is useful in emergencies as well as in situations that do not need faculty commitment to be successful and that are of little consequence to department members. Hiring an excellent candidate as departmental secretary, granting a faculty member an emergency leave to return to his native country because a parent is seriously ill, and permitting a bright, high-achieving undergraduate to take a graduate course are all unilateral decisions that do not necessarily require group decision making.

Another approach, consultative decision making, occurs when a chair makes a decision only after obtaining input from those faculty who will be affected by the decision. It is important, under these circumstances, to be sure that faculty recognize that the chair is not simply tallying votes but will be making the decision himself or herself after securing the points of view of those who will be influenced by the decision. If this point is not clarified, faculty will feel the chair has simply gone through the motions in talking with them about what needs to be decided. Consultation does broaden the base of information needed and lets faculty members know the chair values their opinion. However, it also takes time.

Encouraging Disagreement as a Basis for Sound Decision Making

There are many times in the life of a department when decisions represent premature closure. A recommendation is made. Faculty think it sounds fine and agree quickly. Besides, they know the agenda is heavy today. Only afterwards do they recognize that the decision was a mistake. If it can be undone quickly, no harm is done, but this is not always the case. Part of the chair's task as group leader is to encourage discussion of all sides of an issue before a

decision is made, particularly when the chair recognizes that some individuals who disagree are not making their positions known.

The problem of whether to continue the old rules established by a department regarding the allocation of travel money is an example of a seemingly simple question. If the rule has been to fund anyone who presents a paper at a conference, and someone proposes that money be given instead to faculty who will benefit from attending a conference even though they do not present a paper, some faculty members will gain while others, who counted on travel money, will lose. If the person who makes the recommendation presents the idea as an unselfish gesture ("I have been receiving money to attend conferences for many years now; others have not received any funding, and I would like to give them a turn"), it is hard for other faculty to argue against the proposal. However, if the chair feels that this suggestion is, in fact, not supported by many, the chair might ask the individual who made the suggestion to give all the reasons that support the idea and then ask someone else to be the devil's advocate and present all the reasons why the idea should not be carried out. The presentation of reasons, both pro and con, frees all faculty to present their views, because they are no longer risking standing alone if they take an opposite point of view. Ideally, after full disclosure of different aspects of the issue, consensus will be reached. The important point here is that the chair deliberately encourages disagreement, so that faculty do not feel trapped into voting in a way that does not represent their point of view. Moreover, from this example can be extracted a good principle for chairing a meeting. The role of the chair is to manage conflict, not necessarily resolve it. Whenever a group seems to be reaching closure after exploring only one side of an issue, the chair can ask someone to articulate the opposite side of the question. That individual is then empowered by the chair to disagree, and does not have to risk the disapproval of others when he or she presents a point of view at variance with theirs.

When an individual offers an idea that is in disagreement with what seems to be a majority viewpoint, a group's usual response is first to try to persuade the person to change his or her mind. If that does not work, the individual is then often ignored, an event tantamount to rejection by the group. The person who feels rejected often uses nonverbal cues to indicate his or her feelings at that point. The faculty member may move his or her chair out of the circle or, as in a case I mentioned before, deliberately stare out of the window, thus withdrawing from the discussion. When this happens, that person's commitment to the final decision is lost, and chairs must recognize that they cannot count on that person to support whatever decisions are made. People can become outcasts, always withdrawing from discussions, when the chair does not pay immediate attention to individual reactions at meetings.

It is particularly hard for a group to know how to handle highly critical comments made by a difficult colleague. One of the more effective ways is simply to paraphrase what the individual has said, and perhaps ask him to elaborate or give examples. The message the chair is giving this person is that his input is valued, that he has a right to disagree with others, and that the chair wants to try to understand his point of view. It is then more likely that a collaborative decision will be made, one with which the difficult colleague can agree.

Conflict at a meeting is often unpleasant, and chairs often indicate that conflict is swept under the rug in their departments rather than dealt with directly. However, conflict can truly be a creative tension resulting in a comprehensive decision that addresses more elements than a decision reached without conflict. Conflict, then, can enrich a discussion. It certainly increases the energy level of a group when it occurs. Since conflict can be such a positive force, chairs must learn to manage it successfully so that it broadens discussions and results in better decisions, and that is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

The nature of communication in a department has a significant effect on the way that department functions. Good supportive communication establishes trust, makes faculty members feel a sense of inclusion, and creates a high level of cohesiveness. Methods of problem solving are used in appropriate ways. Conflict is managed, not suppressed. Feedback is given freely and is accepted without defensiveness. Supportive communication also increases the probability that faculty's individual professional development will assist the department to achieve its goals.

It is suggested that chairs set a goal of creating a supportive communication climate in the department by practicing active listening at every opportunity, modeling the constructive use of feedback, empowering others rather than solving their problems for them, and using problem-solving approaches that include appropriate decision-making styles and that focus on problem resolution rather than laying blame. A second suggested goal for chairs from this chapter is to increase the effectiveness of departmental meetings and enhance the positive reactions of the faculty to decisions by planning meetings well, auditing meeting effectiveness, using task and maintenance leaders at meetings, and experimenting with the problem-solving tools and interventions suggested in this chapter.

Chapter Nine

Managing Conflict

The possibility of conflict is normal whenever people interact. Conflict can occur when people want different things, but must settle for the same thing (Coombs, 1987): for example, when some department members want to develop a new major to reflect a shift in faculty strengths to that area and others do not because current resources would then be stretched in a direction that does not represent their interests. Conflict can also occur when two people want the same thing but must settle for different things: for example, when two instructors want to teach the same advanced- or graduate-level course that, according to enrollment projections, can be offered only once a year. If the instructors take turns, each teaching the course once every two years, the time it will take them to keep up with the literature in a specialized area combined with class preparation time will be excessive for such infrequent teaching. In either type of conflict, if self-interests overshadow mutual interests, the likelihood is that each individual will attempt to use power instead of persuasion to resolve the issue. And in either circumstance, if the bond between the people in conflict is not strong, the relationship will be destroyed. For a chair, the task is to preserve departmental stability, which cannot exist when faculty are fragmented one from the next, clique against clique.

By the very nature of their academic preparation, faculty have been trained to be critical of other perspectives, to be skillful in defending their own professional and personal points of view, and to function most effectively in isolation. What many faculty members have not learned is how to make interpersonal conflict productive.