



## Department Chair Online Resource Center

# Academic Mortar to Mend the Cracks: The Holton Model for Conflict Management

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Conflict in higher education is inescapable. As you have learned throughout this book, conflict exists at every level of our academic world.

And while conflict can be negative and can cause deep rifts in the framework of the institution, it can also be used as a tool to take the institution and the people in it from stagnation to a new level of effectiveness. What makes the difference is conflict management.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce a process for managing any conflict which you may encounter. While it is aimed at your role as a department chair or dean, the model given is equally effective in your role as partner or parent, a board member or a volunteer. I will first give a brief overview of the model and then show how it can be used to manage a conflict in higher education.

The Holton Model for Conflict Management is one which can be used with any conflict in any setting.<sup>1</sup> It is important that all parts of the model are used. Attempts at conflict management often fall apart when the conflict is not clearly identified or understood. The saying, "A problem well-defined is half solved" is certainly true for conflict. Because only after identifying the conflict can anyone begin to manage it. Often the presenting conflict, the one that is the most visible, is either a mask for other conflict or only one of a number of conflicts facing the institution.

After the conflict is identified and understood, it is necessary to identify possible solutions. My years of training in creative problem solving reinforce the notion that no problem has only one solution. It is the responsibility of the parties in conflict to find the range of alternative solutions, and then to work with a process to determine which solution is best.

But the parties in conflict are not yet finished. Unless there is a clear, specific plan of action, the conflict management process can again fall apart. The third step in the process is to create that plan of action and to follow it. Who is responsible for what, when? Exactly what is going to happen to implement the solution? A map for this step is necessary.

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With the following three steps of the Holton Conflict Management process, any conflict which you face can be managed.

- 1) Identify the conflict
- 2) Identify solutions
- 3) Implement solutions

At the core of this model is communication. All people involved in the conflict must work on effective communication, including both speaking and listening. In order to understand the conflict, one must first speak clearly and honestly about their issues and then must listen intensely to the others involved in the conflict.

## **1. IDENTIFY THE CONFLICT**

The identification phase of conflict management is a six-step phase, and all of the steps are necessary to understand the conflict.

### **Who Is Involved?**

Identify all of the parties who are involved in the conflict, as well as all who are not directly involved but may be affected by it. What is the relationship of those who are involved? In what ways are they interdependent? Has their relationship changed? What are their roles and responsibilities in relationship to each other and to this conflict situation? What are their prior interactions? Have they been adversaries before? Is this a new conflict? Do they trust each other? Are they polarized? What are the motivations of those involved in the conflict? What do they say are their goals and objectives? How does their behavior support or negate those? What sources of power do those in conflict have? Who are the people not directly involved in the conflict, but likely to be affected by it? Who are those who are likely to be brought into the conflict if it escalates? Are there "ghosts" involved in this conflict? Are there people who were a part of the origins of the conflict (or another related conflict) who are now gone?

### **What Is the Conflict?**

What happened? What are the specific, observable data about the conflict? What are the feelings and emotions surrounding the conflict? What are the presenting issues? What are the secondary (and tertiary) issues?

### **When Did It Happen?**

When did the conflict begin? Is there a specific incident which can be identified? Is it ongoing? Is it cyclical? Is it intermittent? Does it escalate or die down?

### **Where Did It Happen?**

Where physically did the conflict occur? Where, within the organizational structure, did it occur?

### **What Management Attempts Have Been Made?**

What attempts have been made to manage the conflict? If it is a recurring conflict, what attempts have been made in the past? In what ways were they successful? In what ways were they not?

### **What Are the Consequences of the Conflict?**

What will happen if the conflict is not managed? What will happen if it is? What gains and losses are perceived to exist as a result of solutions?

When you have identified and analyzed the conflict, it is necessary for those directly involved in the conflict to work together (often with a neutral third party) to identify solutions.

## **2. IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS**

The development of solutions is rarely a simple process. Setting the stage and getting parties to communicate and work together is a necessary part of this phase of the conflict management process.

### **Develop a Positive Attitude**

Unless those involved in a conflict are willing to work together toward a mutually agreeable solution, no management is possible. And so the first step is to work with the parties to develop a positive attitude. This may require a discussion about ways in which they might benefit from working together in the future and about the positive outcomes which are possible as a result of the management of this conflict.

### **Establish Ground Rules**

Conflict produces a feeling of chaos. It is therefore important to work with the parties to establish ground rules for the conflict management. Ground rules typically include agreements on communication and structure.

### **Identify Interests of the Parties**

Parties must understand their priorities and the outcome(s) they want. Fisher and Ury (1981) have written extensively about the importance of interests versus positions. A position is an entrenched stand (e.g., I will never work with that professor again!). Interests, on the other hand, are the underlying concerns of the parties (e.g., I want Professor Snyder to acknowledge my expertise in dance and show respect for my work and my abilities.). Parties need to understand what they truly want as a result of the management of the conflict. This includes an understanding of what Fisher and Ury refer to as the Best Alternative to the Negotiated Agreement (BATNA). Sometimes it helps to explain to parties what will happen if they don't come together to manage the conflict. Often the threat of externally imposed solutions is enough to get parties to agree to work together.

### **Develop Alternatives**

Now that the issues of the conflict are understood, it is important to identify alternative solutions for managing it. Brainstorming is the best process to develop alternatives. In an environment of trust (usually facilitated by the neutral third party), disputants can work together to develop multiple alternatives. It is also helpful to identify ways that similar issues have been managed in other situations. This gives the disputants an acknowledgement that solutions are possible and may expand their concepts of possible alternatives. This phase must be separate from the decision making based on criteria.

### **Identify Criteria**

Not all of the ideas generated during the previous stage will be appropriate to manage this conflict, so it is necessary to identify appropriate criteria and use those criteria to determine the best solutions. First, there are often objective criteria, given the nature of the conflict. Some criteria are also subjective. These are often overlooked to the peril of the conflict management. After the criteria have been developed, they should be prioritized; not all criteria will carry equal weight in the decision making.

### **Weigh Solutions Against Criteria**

The solutions should be weighed against the prioritized criteria, and a best solution will result. It is important to determine whether that solution is, in fact, felt to be the best by all parties. Too often, after a solution has been agreed upon, parties realize that they left out some important criteria. They may, for example, have identified only rational, logical criteria and ignored any emotional aspects of the decision. Or they may agree on a solution, but realize that they don't have the time to implement it.

## **3. IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS**

Too often this is the phase of conflict management that is neglected. Even when significant time is spent on identification of the conflict and identification of potential solutions, the implementation phase is too often rushed. To have a successful conflict management, the parties must be diligent about the implementation phase.

### **Develop a Plan of Action**

It is not enough to agree to a nebulous solution; all parties in the conflict must agree to the specifics. The plan of action should include:

- Who is going to be involved in the implementation of the solutions? If some people outside the immediate system of the parties are involved, how are they going to be brought in to the solution phase?
- What exactly is to be done? Be as specific as possible about the actions that are to be taken?

- When the parties are going to act? Develop a very clear and concise timeline. What is going to be done tomorrow? By what date will the complete solution be in place? What checkpoints do the parties have along the way? Include in the timeline some check-in dates, when the parties will get together to talk about the solution, about the progress that is being made, and work with any issues that arise during the implementation phase.
- Who is responsible for mediating any differences between the parties during the implementation phase? The plan of action should be written up and signed by all parties, including any neutral third party. This document will be more valuable if every aspect of the agreement is clearly spelled out, in terms that will not be debatable down the line.

### **Determine How to Handle Future Conflict**

As a part of the conflict management process, the parties should agree on a way to deal with conflict in the future. They may, for example, agree to go to the university ombuds officer, to appoint a conflict management committee, or to meet monthly to discuss issues and avert problems.

### **THE CASE OF COMPETING INTERESTS**

How does this model actually work? The *Case of Competing Interests* is a fictional compilation of challenges and opportunities found in institutions throughout the continent. Any resemblance to a specific institution or conflict merely underscores the fact that conflict occurs everywhere in academia today.

Appropriation of and use of space is a problem at many institutions and was the presenting problem with a mid-sized university where many programs were competing for space.

Multiple groups, both on- and off-campus, were competing for performance space. On-campus groups included the music department, the theater department, the dance department, the Troubadours, the Crue (a student performance group), the student activities office, and the office of institutional planning. Off-campus groups also wanted to rent the space for community theater groups, dance recitals, commerce department speakers, and others.

For many years, all parties involved in the conflict were feuding about space—all feeling that there was not enough space and what space that existed belonged to "me." Everyone had excellent

rationales for the precedence that their program should take. For academic departments, performance was required for course work. The co-curricular activities of clubs and programs were considered vital for student development. Making space available to community civic groups established necessary goodwill to the community.

Annually, internecine warfare erupted at calendar-setting time. Typically, everyone came to the table with positions firmly established: They had their list of events and dates and the space they must have. Everyone emerged from the meetings unhappy—no one got everything they wanted. And so during the academic year, people in each of those areas worked behind the scenes to get special favors, to swap whatever they had, and to figure out any way to get the space when and how they wanted it. It was a conflict that only escalated yearly and one that had to be managed. They decided that they needed help.

Whenever I am involved in conflict management, I begin with an extensive information gathering phase in which I interview everyone connected to the conflict.

## **1. IDENTIFY THE CONFLICT**

### **Who Is Involved?**

You must first identify who is involved by department or division. This conflict under discussion here crosses most major divisions in the institution. The space is maintained by the department of facilities, the student affairs division handles student performance groups and all programming of events for students on campus, the academic affairs division is in charge of any academic program and their subsequent performance related to coursework, and the office of institutional planning works with external groups who want to come to the university.

**People who are directly involved.** Within each of those areas, who are the people involved in the conflict? In facilities, it was the building scheduler. In student affairs, both the director of student programming and the advisor for student clubs were involved. In academic affairs, the chairs of the departments of dance, music, and theatre, as well as the individuals in charge of the performances came to the group, as well as a representative from the office of institutional planning who worked with both on-campus and off-campus programming.

Who else was involved in this issue? There were some people in each department or division who had no formal role, but who were pivotal to the conflict. The technical director was involved as was the director of the alumni association who interacted with the alumni who want to host events at the university.

**Students.** In what ways are the students involved? In this conflict, the students felt that they were in the middle and often heard anger among their professors and advisors as space issues were discussed. Many students, as double majors or participants in more than one performance activity, felt torn in their loyalties between professors and programs.

**The history.** In looking at relationships with this issue, a tangled history of cooperative and competing efforts was discovered. Although each competed for the limited spaces on campus, there was also cooperation. Many of the professors involved in performance classes were also advisors of student clubs. They also frequently collaborated on programming and helped each other out with performances. There was a range of academic and performance experience among the faculty and advisors. Some professional jealousy was present; some felt that their experience and background were far superior to that of anyone else. There was also a strong element of entitlement. Some professors and advisors felt that they were entitled to the space they requested because their program or activity was, in their eyes, the most important on campus and far superior in quality to other performances.

This was the sentiment expressed by the student activities people as well. They felt that their programs served all students at the university, not just the few who were in performance programs.

And so the adversarial—and the cooperative—relationships have existed between all involved for a long time. In fact, the adversarial relationships existed long before most of the current players came to the university. In listening to everyone tell their story, it was discovered that there were a few ghosts in this conflict.

More than 30 years ago, the chairs of the departments of music and dance were in conflict. There were no other programs, no student activities office, and no outsiders competing for their space. Their conflict, therefore, was more limited than the current one, and perhaps more fierce. There were legendary battles about performance space and stories of pianos being moved and equipment being sabotaged. Annually, battles were waged about whose performances would get prime-time scheduling.



It was bad enough when it was just the two departments. As the university grew, student affairs began student programming, more departments with performance components were established, and more people wanted the same spaces. As the departmental historian says, "All hell broke loose."

Almost no one involved in the original conflict was still in the university. But the tales, possibly embellished, of the fights in the early days are legion.

This is an example of the ghosts—the parties of conflict which are truly present in spirit, but no longer so in body. When this happens, you can only ask, "And how does that affect our work today?" Bring those ghosts out of the closet and into open discussion. It is interesting for the history of the department, and for the history of the conflict, to thoroughly understand how those ghosts impact today, and then to let go of them, their history, and their power to impact the present.

In this conflict, there was ambiguity in roles. There needed to be a clarification of ultimate responsibility. Who was responsible for the decisions about the performance spaces at the institution? That person needed to be involved in the conflict management. What role do others have in the space allocation? Conflict often occurs because two people (or two divisions or departments) believe that they are in charge of the same area. The conflict is sometimes easily managed at this point by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the people involved.

**The role of power.** Power, or lack of power, is often the cause of conflict between people in academia (as well as outside of it). What sources of power do those in conflict have? Is the conflict really a power play, with one person desirous of the power or perceived power of another? The music department chair believed that the external programmer was listened to, got more prime-time performance space, and was therefore more powerful than she. In a power conflict, often the true issue is a lack of affirmation for the self or the program. The music department chair needed to hear that she and her program were valued by the university.

It is sometimes difficult to get people to recognize that power is infinite and that the more people with power in a department, division, or school, the better! The translation of power—from power *over* to power *to*—changes the perception not only of power but of ways to use power as a positive force in conflict management. Power to enables everyone to determine ways in which they have the power to work effectively. After many hours of working together, the people in this conflict decided that they were going to have to work together in order to manage the conflict. Working together, they had power

to make decisions that were best for all performance programs. If they did not, some external power broker was going to come in and do it for them—which meant that they would have no power to decide their fate and that of their programs.

**Motivations.** Next, determine the motivations of those in conflict. What are their goals and objectives in this conflict? What do they hope to gain? It is important to determine whether their actions support or negate those goals and objectives. Perhaps the person is too close to the battle to see how she/he is acting. And some clarification of that reality will help the person to understand her/his behavior and subsequently change that behavior. In this conflict, it was important to show how the behavior of the faculty and administrators was affecting the students. Virtually everyone said that their stance was for the good of the students. But their behavior created negative modeling for the students. They needed to see how their positional conflict behavior was in fact hurting the students.

It is important to identify who is not directly involved in the conflict but likely to be effected by it. In this case, and in academia in general, it is often the students who are one heartbeat away from the conflict. It is almost always desirable to keep the conflict out of the classroom and away from the students. The job of learning is complex enough; students do not need to add taking sides in a conflict to their busy schedules.

You now have information about who is and isn't involved. It is time to determine the "what."

### **What Is the Conflict?**

In this phase, it is important to identify exactly what happened. What are the specific, observable facts about the conflict (who, what, when, where, why, how)? In interviewing each person, ask for that individual's version of what happened. If a specific incident ignited the conflict, then you will find out. If the conflict is a more diffuse one, it will become obvious either that there is no clear "what," or that the "what" happened long ago. At lower levels of conflict, it is relatively easy for people to define the conflict (e.g., I am always scheduled for an 8:00 class and am the only one in the department who has to teach at that time.) As the conflict level increases, it will be more difficult to isolate an exact instance.

In this case, the facts are diffuse. Faculty complaints included: "They always get the dates they want," "We never have enough opportunities for performance," "There is no place for our students to experience what it is to sing before a live audience," and "The university is for all students, and we can't program enough for them all." After intense questioning, it became clear that while there were a few specific incidents, the larger problem was one of a feeling of inequality rather than specific instances of it.

It was also clear that emotions were running high. Virtually everyone in the process felt slighted, overlooked, unimportant, and undervalued. Almost everyone argued that her/his students were hurt (no one, of course, argued that he or she was hurt personally).

While gathering information, it is important to hear not only what we scientifically refer to as facts or those things that are specific, measurable, and observable, but also to gather the feelings and emotions that surround the conflict. Conflict is never emotion free, and emotions are an important part of the identification process. The emotional reactions are also likely to be different from the various parties involved, so it is important to identify emotional response from everyone involved.

As a part of this phase, ask people what they perceive to be the issues. It is helpful to ask an objective question while you are gathering these facts. "What is happening?" and "What are the issues facing the department/ division/ school?" are objective questions that will get wider responses than just asking "What's wrong?"

In this case, the parties identified issues of lack of performance time; lack of adequate space for concerts, plays, recitals, and programs; lack of opportunities for students to present their work; and lack of cooperation among the departments and divisions of the university.

### **When Did It Happen?**

It is sometimes difficult for parties to pin down the beginning of the conflict. You need to try to determine when the conflict began. Was there a specific incident that started the conflict (e.g., during the meeting on Friday, when we were discussing the strategic plan, Glenn said that the computer science department was the only one that needed new computers)?

Also determine whether the conflict is ongoing. Sometimes parties cannot identify the specific time when the conflict began, but say it feels as if they have always been in conflict. Such was the case in the conflict under consideration.

As noted earlier, this conflict was of long-standing. It pre-dated the university's student activities division and almost everyone now involved in the departments and divisions on campus. The ghosts of previous players were called up to support the conflict, to fuel the fire.

This is a clear case of a cyclical conflict. It became stronger every spring semester when calendar-setting time began. Weeks before the scheduled meeting, people began to be stressed and tense, and to complain about "them."

### **Where Did It Happen?**

If the parties involved can identify what happened and when, they might also be able to determine where the conflict occurred. Does it always occur when we meet on the stage in the Black Box theater? Might there be a reason for that? If you probe a bit, you might find that the space for the Black Box theater originally was dance department performance space, and someone (no one remembered who or why) gave it to the theatre department. Being in the space reminded the dance people of the inequities they feel they have suffered. We decided to meet in a different place.

It is also important to determine where in the organizational structure the conflict occurs. Does it always occur between department chairs? If so, it may mean that there is not a clear role and responsibility identification for those chairs. Or if it always occurs between the student clubs, it may be that there is a lack of clarity of the goals of the student clubs. If the conflict frequently occurs in the same place on the organizational structure, then there is a problem of clarity in the responsibilities and roles of the people involved and a lack of communication between the people in these roles.

In this case, the conflict occurred on a more diffuse level. It had been going on long enough to permeate relationships at every level.

### **Have There Been Management Attempts?**

People often try to manage a conflict before it becomes public knowledge. In this instance, the chairs of dance and music talked and tried to come up with a time that each wanted to do their performance. Unfortunately, each wanted to do the annual Easter concert on the same weekend.

While it is good for people in conflict to work together to manage the conflict, such unsuccessful attempts might also make people more entrenched in their position.

When both chairs tried to work together and came up with no answer, they both felt "see, I tried, and he was totally unreasonable." Or perhaps the theatre department and the student affairs department both feel that in the past they have given in to the demands of the other and rescheduled so that the other could do some programming. And they feel that even though they gave up their first choice, the other was never satisfied. They go into another conflict feeling that this is going to fail also.

So it is helpful to know what previous attempts have been made and the level of success and failure that the parties have felt. They have also probably had some successful negotiations over the use of space, and it is important to really try to articulate those experiences.

In this case, one such instance stands out. The regional commerce department wanted to schedule its annual meeting showcasing the people and companies in the area who had made outstanding contributions to the region during the year. But the dance department had a lavish performance, complete with elaborate sets, ready for the same weekend. After much conversation and the help of a third party, the two came up with an amicable solution. The sets would remain and the dancers would come to perform for the commerce department event. The department's work was showcased, the commerce department could use the space, have free, quality entertainment, and all went away happy.

Recalling such successful management of conflict helped the parties to realize that they could work together, and that they in fact had done so in previous instances.

### **What Are the Consequences of the Conflict?**

Finally, all parties have to think about the consequences of the conflict. What will happen if the conflict is not managed successfully? In this case, the conflict is only going to escalate and the frustration level of everyone involved will increase. But in some conflicts, the consequences of not resolving the conflict are negligible. Sometimes it is just easier and more politic to let the conflict go.

In this case, the gains of managing the conflict far outweigh the losses. A process needed to be identified and put into place that would be used in the future for the management of all of the possible performance spaces at the institution.

After this information about the nature of the conflict has been acquired, the conflict can be understood. Then it is necessary to work with the parties directly involved in the conflict to identify solutions. Those directly involved in the conflict must work together (often with a neutral third party) to identify solutions.

## **2. IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS**

The development of solutions is not a simple process. Setting the stage and getting parties to communicate and work together is a necessary part of this phase of the conflict management process.

### **Develop a Positive Attitude**

Is everyone willing to work together toward a mutually agreeable solution? If not, this process won't work. In the identification phase, I mentioned finding some instances where the parties did work together effectively. The group came up with a number of such instances so that they began to realize that the conflicts can be managed, and that they had a history of working together. Working together, the parties created a long list of performances and events where everyone worked together, where they negotiated space and time, and where people did come away satisfied.

It sometimes helps to list the benefits of working together. The people competing for performance space acknowledged a long list of the reasons that working together was in the best interest of everyone involved. So they went into the solution identification phase with a positive attitude.

### **Establish Ground Rules**

The chaos of conflict had been experienced frequently by everyone involved in this case, so they were willing to establish ground rules for their work together.

**Communication.** Everyone thinks that they know how to listen effectively, so it is important to approach a lesson in active listening and feedback as a reminder to everyone to use information they already have. We had a brief session on these and had everyone practice it. In the practice sessions, I asked everyone to engage in active listening as their partners spoke of the most exciting performance

experience they had been involved with at this institution. Then I had them give and receive feedback as their partners discussed a way in which they had worked together or seen the other person work positively. There is plenty of time for negatives; at the early part of conflict management it is important to get people to affirm each other.

**Structure.** People in chaos want structure. In this case, we agreed to meet every Tuesday afternoon from 3:00 to 5:30 for two months. We agreed that at the end of the two months, we would meet to assess the progress and determine whether it was necessary to keep meeting. The entire group stated that they would stay with the process and come to every meeting. The meetings would take place in the library's conference room, a neutral space which was not owned by anyone in the discussion.

### **Identify Interests of the Parties**

It is vital that the conflict manager find out the true interest of people in the conflict. In their seminal volume, *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury (1981) talk further about interest bargaining.

One way for me to capture interest versus positional bargaining involves one piece of cake and two people. I offer moist chocolate cake with thick chocolate icing to two people. But I only have one piece of cake. So what do I do? Of course, I cut it in half! I give it to the two people and watch them eat it. But I see that one eats only the icing and the other eats only the cake. What would have happened if I asked each person why they wanted the cake? Then I would have discovered the interest of each—that one wanted icing and one wanted cake—and would have managed the "conflict" differently.

You must find out the interest of each person involved in the conflict. In this case, I had to determine what all involved truly wanted. Did they want their students to have at least three performances a semester? Then it may not matter which space it is in. Did they want the students to feel the experience of performing on the largest stage at the university? Did they want to break the record for the largest musical performance ever held at the university? Did they want to provide a variety of entertainment experiences for the students?

It is necessary to get away from positions (e.g., "We must have the Easter concert on the main stage on the first Saturday of April") to interests (e.g., "I want the students to have an opportunity to perform their music, and I want to do it soon after spring break").



## **Develop Alternatives**

We now understand the interests of everyone involved; we understand the conflicts and have identified the issues. It is now time to identify alternative solutions.

We did this in a number of ways. I suggested that people find out the ways that performance space is handled at other institutions. They returned with information that identified ways in which performance space was used in other institutions of the same size with comparable needs. Some other people looked into the history of performances and programs at the university and discovered what had been done in the past.

Everyone went to their departments and their classes and asked for input from their colleagues and their students. Often those who are involved in the programs—but not directly involved in the conflict—can shed some wonderful light on solutions.

After everyone spoke about the information they gathered, we held a brainstorming session and covered the walls with newsprint containing possible solutions.

It is important that an atmosphere of trust had been established so that people could do true brainstorming: coming up with ideas that were outrageous, improbable, and creative without judging themselves or each other.

## **Identify Criteria**

We now had these wonderful ideas, but had to do some gleaning. The first thing we did at our next session together was to establish criteria that would be used to determine the best ideas. With the newsprint taped to the wall, we first eliminated all ideas that were clearly illegal or immoral. Then we decided on objective criteria:

Implementation of the solution had to be possible by April of the following year when planning was to begin; it had to cost less than \$3,000 to implement (so we couldn't build a new building, for example); it had to fall within the mission of the university and the mission of all of the departments and divisions involved; and it had to have a positive effect on the students.

Then subjective criteria must be included. The most important subjective criterion was that everyone involved had to like the idea. While no one could specifically define what that meant, it was clear that a solution that didn't feel right to the people around the table would never be successfully implemented.



## **Weigh Solutions Against Criteria**

It does take a long time to weigh each solution against the criteria. But it is important to discuss each of the ideas and see how they fit the established criteria above. After we did that, the best solutions emerged. They included both long-term and short-term solutions. The long term (which did not fit the immediate criteria of time, but came about as a result of the discussion) was to thoroughly investigate the entire campus and the city in which the university was located to see if alternative performance space could be found.

There were multiple short-term solutions agreed upon: to establish a rotation system for major performances; to expand the "seasons" so that more programming could be done within the framework of a "special" time; to establish a ranking system for all other use of space, with priority given to academic programs, then to student affairs, and then to external programming; and to establish a performance space committee, charged with making the decisions about the space.

The solutions decided upon above were much too amorphous, as is often the case. The implementation phase must make them more concrete and determine exactly what will be done, by whom, and by when.

## **3. IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS**

### **Develop a Plan of Action**

Each of the solutions agreed upon the need for a specific plan of action. In order to explain the process, let me take just one of their agreed upon solutions, that of establishing a ranking system for use of space.

**Who.** A committee was formed, including representatives of the conflict management team and two additional representatives from each department and division involved. We decided that everyone who was a stakeholder in the process was included in the original conflict management group, but that it was important for the vice presidents to be alerted to the agreed solutions so that they could buy into the implementation phase. They were informed and invited to be a part of this process.

**What.** The group was to establish a ranking system so that every event considered for the currently existing performance spaces would be ranked. The top ranking events would have scheduling priority.

**When.** The group began working immediately, using the same time as the conflict management group, Tuesdays from 3:00 to 5:30. They agreed to have a ranking system in place in one month which would be brought back to the original conflict management group for its consideration. After the plan was approved by the group, it would be sent to the vice presidents and president for final approval.

**Mediation.** The conflict consultant would be called upon to mediate if further conflict ensued. However, the group felt strongly that it could now manage the conflicts that might erupt as it worked on this solution.

The plan of action was written up and signed by all parties. The document served as a check for the process and the procedure.

### **Determine How to Handle Future Conflict**

This group of people, representatives from many departments and divisions across the institution, successfully worked together to manage a conflict that had haunted them for years. They agreed that, for the first year, they would meet monthly to check on the progress of the subcommittees and to discuss any conflicts that occurred.

I agreed that they could call me to talk through the process and the problems if and when they occurred. A contact person was chosen so that everyone would not call me, thus possibly fueling other conflict.

They also agreed that if significant conflict surfaced, they would call in the consultant at the beginning of the process, rather than wait until they were ready to declare war on the other divisions and departments.

## **AND THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER**

Well, yes and no. As the institution grows, conflicts continue to surface. But this group now has a process to work through conflicts. And the people who were involved in the original conflict management team are committed to working together. They have also modeled for the entire institution a positive implementation of a conflict management process and have been called upon by others to talk about their experience.

The cultural shift from an antagonistic to a cooperative environment was a significant one for all involved. And that is one of the benefits of effective conflict management.

The appropriate mortar of an effective conflict management process can work to mend the cracks in the ivory tower.

## **ENDNOTE**

1. It is also important, however, to know when the conflict is beyond your abilities. Some conflicts are easily managed by the parties involved or by inviting an interested third party from the institution. In your role, you are often that "interested third party." But sometimes the conflict has reached a level of distress where someone from outside the institution must come in. When that happens, I cannot stress enough the importance of getting a conflict management expert to come in to help you. Find someone who works with conflict in academia—because as you well know, academia and "big business" are not the same.

## **REFERENCE**

Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (1981). *Getting to yes*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.