FAC125 Collaborative and Interpersonal Communications

## Case Study 3

You would think that board members of the Buckner Valley food bank would be, for the most part, pleasant, selfless people who were trying to give something back to the community by volunteering their time to help provide food for those who needed a little help. Yet the board members often found themselves embroiled in conflict, due in part to some of their personalities.

Jeff meant well, but he seemed to have a need to dominate the board. He talked too much, and although he was not the current board chair, he wanted to insist that his ideas were the ones to be implemented. Jeff’s dominance made other board members reactively reject his ideas, even when the ideas were good ones, such as purchasing a new van to make food deliveries. Tired of Jeff’s overly bombastic style of trying to get his way, they usually disagreed with him regardless of the merit of his suggestions.

Aiden also meant well, but he missed about half of the twice-monthly meetings. He often didn’t follow through on assignments. Yet he liked being on the board because it looked good on his resume, he was planning on running for city council next year and wanted to demonstrate his concern for the community by being on the board. Even when Aiden was present he seemed mentally absent; he didn’t say much, even though as manager of the local grocery store he had much to offer.

Jessica was a hard worker—maybe too hard. She always followed through on her assignments and had little patience for people who didn’t do what they were supposed to do. She did more than just raise her voice when expressing her concerns; she yelled and often screamed obscenities at members who made the smallest errors or mistakes. Because of her hard work, the board needed her; but members were frankly a bit afraid of her wrath and just kept quiet when she hollered at them. They didn’t want to upset her further because they knew she would holler even louder.

Hudson always thought the food bank was running out of money (even when it wasn’t). He longed for the good old days when just he and C.J. ran the food bank. So Hudson was typically against any new ideas, especially anything that cost money. When strategies were suggested to raise more funds, Hudson was against it; he didn’t agree with the philosophy “it takes money to raise money,” so he blocked most new ideas.

C.J., current board chair, was the glue that held the board together. She was mild-mannered yet hardworking and talented at keeping the other board members moving forward (most of the time). Yet she was getting weary of the constant bickering, power struggles, and inactivity on the part of some.

It was time for the board to organize the annual holiday gift basket program for Buckner Valley, yet the board just wasn’t making progress. The need was greater this year than ever because of the downturn in the economy. Many people had lost their jobs and would have no holiday if it weren’t for the food bank. Jeff had a good idea for streamlining the operation so that more families could be fed, but other members rejected his idea because they didn’t want Jeff to get credit for the idea. Since Aiden ran the grocery store, he could make a major difference in the community, but he didn’t have time to attend many meetings. He just didn’t seem to have time or interest. Hudson didn’t want to spend a dime more than what was spent last year and was against any new plan that might cost more money. Jessica was at her prickly best, and, although she could do the work, she had nothing but critical comments for her fellow board members. C.J. knew the Buckner Valley community was depending on the board, so she was intent on doing whatever she could to feed even more people this year—families were depending on it.

Questions

1. Based on the descriptions of pseudo, simple and ego conflict discussed in class, what type or types of conflict do you see evident on the board?

I feel like Hudson is the epicenter/cause of a lot of simple conflict. He had the same goals as the other participating members, the problem is that he disagrees with the other member’s ideas for “how” to reach the goals because he doesn’t realize the same old methods won’t work anymore.

Jeff and all interactions surrounding him reek of ego conflict. He felt the need to be heard and then forced himself to be heard so much that people tuned him out. Now all he gets is auto rejection which causes him to try and be heard even more. (I am like this)

I don’t see a ton of pseudo conflict. For the most part people seem to be on the same page, just disagreeing on little things.

1. What different styles of conflict management do you see among the board members? How do those different styles affect the level of conflict among board members?

Jessica steamrolls anyone who dare oppose her and those who have made mistakes. “If she can overpower everyone then there is no conflict” is the thought process here. From her perspective this works like a charm because it gets people to shut up, listen, and agree, it’s also a great motivator for people to mess up less. Sadly, this approach is awful for the rest of the group.

Aiden might just be busy, or he is avoiding the conflict altogether by trying to be absent. (I’m pretty sure he just doesn’t care that much)

Most of these people seem to be creating conflict instead of managing it at all, and the one person who we were told manages the conflict we were not given any examples, so I don’t really know their style.

1. Which collaborative conflict-management principles and skills would be helpful for board members to implement to address the recurring conflicts they were experiencing?

I believe they need to take turns and communicate one at a time and address their obstacles one bullet point at a time. This could solve Jeff dominating with his ideas while also letting his good ideas not get auto rejected.

If they proposed ideas, then did a pros cons list and had members individually assess their priorities with those pros and cons we could solve why Hudson doesn’t want to do anything.

As a leader C.J. needs to step up and stop Jessica from exploding on people because that is not ok and is as destructive to the team as Jessica’s work is helpful.

1. Based on the strategies discussed in class, what suggestions would you make to help manage the array of personalities present on the board?

I would suggest that the board comes up with a procedure to evaluate ideas when deciding between options.

I would suggest that meetings have a more structured to evenly regulate who can talk and when during meetings

I would suggest that minutes should be kept for the meeting and those will be sent out to those who were not there for the meeting, furthermore if you don’t attend the meeting work can be delegated to you and not completing the work is grounds for being removed from the board.

Jessica seems to be a bit too stressed; she should delegate some responsibilities to other members, especially those not participating.

The group also needs to chill out and not be so rude to Jeff >:(