

Creating Aligned Commitment and Action

Overcoming Inter-departmental Conflict

The Presenting Problem

*“We need these 2 departments to get along better.
This problem has gone on far too long.”*

That was the frustration expressed when the human resources representative of a large college within the University of Washington contacted Pacific Integral. The College was feeling the impact of this problem in staff morale, service to students and faculty, incomplete work, and a declining sense of customer care from its community.

Pacific Integral’s Involvement

Pacific Integral’s assessment revealed a number of inter-related causes for the difficulties between the two departments. These causes included lack of clarity and poor alignment on departmental goals, unclear expectations and accountabilities for specific tasks, ineffective supervisory skills and oversight from management, work that was supposed to have been transferred to computer systems two years prior never being put in place, and a pervasive lack of appreciation experienced by staff in both departments. What might have seemed like a simple problem requiring better communication skills in fact was merely one symptom of a complex set of circumstances, all of which needed attention in order to help the college effectively improve its situation.

Pacific Integral began by working with department leadership to develop a structure for clarifying goals, identifying performance measures and providing regular support and feedback to staff. Pacific Integral worked with staff to create a project team of staff from both departments. This team identified a compelling, overarching goal for the student application and admission process and began work on clarifying tasks, accountabilities and content. As they proceeded, Pacific Integral provided coaching, facilitation and training to improve their ability to communicate, have hard conversations, manage a complex process and get results.

Results

The departments clarified and strengthened their working and personal relationships and improved the efficiency and applicant-friendly aspects of their admissions process. They identified and began to implement other projects that would further strengthen their partnership with other departments in the College. Leadership became more aware of the need to support staff in their work, both in appreciating them and in holding them accountable for results. Leadership also realized that they needed to be involved in obtaining additional resources for their staff and obtained the computer programming and faculty support needed to improve the system performance.

At the conclusion of the work together one of the department heads stated,

*“This has really had an impact on how people see each other.
People are working much more effectively together now.”*