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Review of Conflict Management for Libraries: Strategies for a Positive, Productive Workplace

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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR LIBRARIES: STRATEGIES FOR A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE WORKPLACE

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR LIBRARIES: STRATEGIES FOR A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE WORKPLACE. *Jack Montgomery and Eleanor I. Cook. Chicago: ALA, 2005. xii, 207 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0-8389-0890-7. ISBN-10: 0-8389-0890-X.*

Although conflict occurs everywhere, the unique features of the library workplace, such as the non-transferable library service skills and the related "jobs for life" nature of library careers; the largely detail-oriented, recurring, civil service characteristics of library work; and the need for support from above, often converge to create hotbeds of conflicts and challenges for library administrators, managers, and supervisors.

The authors, drawing on their own formal and informal observations from working at academic libraries and conducting workshops on conflict management in libraries, researched the topic using data they had collected from a broader, electronic survey. The seventeen scenarios they developed using survey results are intended to demonstrate the causes of typical conflict situations and suggest possible ways to reach their resolution or even prevention. The book attempts to help library managers choose effective strategies for working with all parties, identify and understand the roots of conflict, plan for personnel conflicts that arise every day in libraries, and adopt appropriate approaches to defuse or resolve them.

The book is divided into three parts—an overview, conflict case studies, and conflict management tools. Part 1 attempts to provide readers a general picture of the issues to be discussed in the book. It opens with an overview of the autocratic history of library administration and the transition to modern library management, the common causes and symptoms of library workplace conflicts, and a number of realistic approaches to resolving these conflicts. Important concepts introduced in this part include role playing; knowing rules of the game; situations in which role playing does not work; acting like an adult; rewards and recognition; playing politics; unions; and dealing with workplace violence.

Part 2 analyzes the results of the online survey in the form of case studies or "scenarios." Each scenario tells, with information on the type and area of library in which the conflict takes place, a story of typical workplace conflicts, such as tension between an internal candidate and an external candidate; dealing with a staff member whose performance was significantly affected by covering for a coworker; being confronted by a staff member who feels ignored; conflict between staff members caused by religious preaching; anxiety caused by staff members breaking library rules; sexual harassment complaint of a staff member against another; facing a weak boss and bad work environment, an overstepping advisory board or delays of other departments; irritation by someone who wants to do your job for you; dealing with a staff member who plays on staff's sympathies; managing an overcrowded library; problems with staff members with emotional problems; supervising "totally incompatible" staff members; dealing with staff in racially charged situations; and staff members with drug problems. Each story is followed by two conflict consultants' (a human resources counselor's and a managerial consultant's) assessments and the authors' analysis of factors leading to the conflict and things needed to be done to prevent or deal with the conflict. Perspectives and conflict management methodologies are skillfully illustrated with real life, library-specific examples from various types and areas of libraries.

Drawing on what typical conflicts take place in libraries, part 3 offers some constructive tools for creating a positive working environment and preventive tools to meet the challenge of conflict in libraries ahead. Suggested tools that library managers can use for conflict management include developing emotional intelligence, planning for workplace conflict, examining one's organizational culture, and leadership that goes beyond management.

The survey and its results are included in the appendix, followed by references and an index of terms used in various chapters.

    Conflict Management for Libraries is obviously a well researched book. It is indeed a practical, useful handbook for managing library workplace stress and conflict. It meets the authors' stated goals and it is highly recommended for all library administrators, managers, and supervisors.

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