

Briefing Paper: Curam, June 2011

Working with conflict – that's not at all easy!

'Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reason, for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not at all easy.' Aristotle

Aristotle is really on to something here! Dealing with conflict with our colleagues is one of the most stressful parts of the job. We often feel cornered into it by the demands of budget cuts, implications of subject options, parental pressures, departmental needs – *the redeployment fallout for example!* School leaders are at the hub of the issues that are likely to require conflict 'navigation' – but how to review and develop those conflict 'navigation' skills?

Curam in partnership with NAPD has been - through our March Strategic Toolbox sessions in Galway, Kilkenny, Cork and Dublin - working with over 60 Principals and Deputies looking at the immediate and urgent conflict issues and how to manage them strategically. For example we tackled some of the most common cases of challenging situations in our scenarios that were very enthusiastically received by participants!! – here's one:

Belligerent Bobby – he is one that can keep you awake at night before a staff meeting – he seems to you intent on tripping you up whenever he can. He has an uncanny ability to rouse staff to complete opposition by his very articulate interventions – what started as a proposal that was gaining support, he manages to turn around. He has a close group of 'fellow-travellers' who invest a lot of time ensuring that they are a real power group on the staff. Not many will openly oppose them. They are always articulate and well prepared. They are mostly good teachers and heavily involved in particular extra-curricular activities that they have controlled for many years. You want to shake things up to get new ideas ...

We worked on all the many ways to 'deal' with Belligerent Bobby – and some of those ways were creative indeed!!! This is where the learning was, where participants could add to their toolbox of ideas, strategies and approaches to see what would fit for them in navigating the conflict of such a personality. On the programme, participants learned a lot more about their particular conflict management style, how to move in and out of other styles, how to be strategic and tactical as they addressed some of the most intractable situations that present themselves as well as the very common but equally stressful episodes involved in school leadership. The second module of the Toolbox series will focus in greater detail on the wider area of conflict management in all its many guises. This Module Two series will commence in Term One of the next academic year 2011/12.

Visit our seminars page on this site for further information on upcoming events.

Luke Monahan

