EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND TEAM-BUILDING WORKSHOP

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MOTIVATIONS AND WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Effective communication and collaboration skills are paramount to the success of any workplace, yet scientists and other professionals often lack formal training in this area. For the second year in a row, the PDOC took advantage of an annual international meeting to organize a full-day, all-CMORE professional development workshop, on the day prior to the start of the 2014 Ocean Sciences Meeting in Honolulu, on Sunday, February 23, 2014. In total, 19 C-MORE and 14 invited participants discussed and learned about effective ways to recognize and resolve conflicts arising from workplace bias. This workshop was organized in collaboration with C-MORE faculty and the workshop facilitator, Dr. Susan Hippensteele, Professor of Women’s Studies and Strategic Planning Coordinator at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The workshop was offered as part of the Diversity Module of C-MORE’s Professional Development Training Program, and it built upon an earlier collaboration with Dr. Hippensteele (who was a guest speaker at another Diversity Workshop focused on family-career balance).

Participants represented five C-MORE institutions (UH, WHOI, MIT, OSU, and Columbia) and five other institutions, as well as a range of career stages (1 undergraduate student, 14 graduate students, 5 postdoctoral scientists, 6 staff members, and 7 faculty members or senior professionals) in oceanography, natural resource management, and science communication. Additionally, the workshop brought together at least ten different cultures (from the Philippines to Chile), speaking at least six different languages, with 67% females and 33% males. Prior to the workshop, participants submitted biographies describing their interests in diversity and both personal and professional identities. Participant biographies were often revealing, which served to break the ice and set the stage for open communication on the day of the workshop. These diverse professional, cultural, and personal backgrounds created the perfect scenario for the discussion of communication tools and workplace conflict-solving associated with culture, gender, race, personal history, or other biases.

The workshop consisted of two sessions. During the morning session, participants shared and learned skills for the assessment and resolution of three standard workplace conflicts in academic and research environments (pay equity and discrimination, family balance during job transition, and manuscript
Discussion was led by Dr. Hippensteele who shared best practices for the resolution of each independent scenario. During the afternoon session, a panel of speakers (Drs. Patricia Cooper, Sonya Dyhrman, Ricardo Letelier, and Angel White) shared professional experiences and provided personal tips related to diversity and effective communication in the workplace.

**WORKSHOP OUTCOMES**

PDQC members designed, administered, and evaluated three assessments of workshop efficacy: a pre-survey (administered 10 days before the workshop), a workshop evaluation (administered immediately after the workshop), and a post-survey (administered ~10 weeks after the workshop).

**Evaluation Results**

Feedback from the workshop evaluations indicated high satisfaction levels. On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), respondents (n=23) rated the workshop as an average of 8.1. 70% of participants “Agreed” or “Strongly agreed” that, overall, they felt more capable of resolving conflicts after than before the workshop. Strikingly, 100% stated that they would recommend this workshop to a peer, for reasons including its usefulness for a successful career in academia.

Qualitatively, participants recognized that the workshop provided a forum for much-needed conversations: "(This workshop covered) issues that we all have in the workplace but generally... are not spoken about ... if you talk about it, you are the 'weak one' or the 'one with the problem.'" They clearly took to heart the mentorship provided by the workshop facilitator and guest speakers and left the workshop with a heightened sense of hope that they could become successful in their careers while overcoming personal challenges:

"(I learned that) I am not alone! Others have similar experiences. Almost everything I want to do is possible -- others have done it before me."

"(I learned that) the 'battle has not been won' [to overcome inequity in science fields] and to be persistent and continue on."

When prompted to share three things that they learned in the workshop, participants articulated specific communication and support strategies useful to careers in science:

"People will respond (to) how you package yourself ... you need to be assertive, learn to negotiate, and know your rights."

"(This workshop) reiterated (the) importance of effective communication early in a conflict in order to avoid making it worse."

"It is important to recognize how others communicate."

"Keep the expectations stated clearly."

"Finding multiple mentors was most widely advised by all panel members."
We firmly believe that these (and similar) encounters with faculty and science professionals will be instrumental in encouraging early career scientists to pursue their passions and talents and to promote a diverse and supportive workplace.

**Pre- versus post-survey results**

For the first time, PDOC designed a pre-/post-survey intended to measure quantitative changes in participants’ self-perception of their support networks and communication tools. Participants were asked to rank seven statements on a Likert scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). One of the most revealing differences was in the pre- versus post-responses to the statement: “I have the skills needed to resolve conflicts in the workplace.” Prior to the workshop, only 18% of respondents (n=17) agreed with this statement. Following the workshop, 73% of respondents (n=11) agreed that they possessed skills needed to resolve conflicts in the workplace. We attribute this outcome to two likely factors: (1) group problem-solving of workplace scenarios (in the morning workshop session) and (2) inspiring stories from more senior faculty and professionals (in the afternoon workshop session), who optimistically acknowledged that although professional challenges exist, they can be overcome with hardship, effective communication, positive attitude, and a supportive network, together with your personal love for science and your work.

Additionally, we asked participants to respond to the open-ended questions, “How have you applied the lessons learned in the workshop, and/or how do you expect to apply these lessons in the future?” and “Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your experiences with diversity and communication in the workplace?” Respondents described a few roles in which they are applying these tools: to improve communication with mentees, to speak more openly with peers, and to brainstorm ways to approach more senior colleagues. Another revealing finding relates to participants awareness of diversity if the workplace. Prior to the workshop, 35% of respondents considered their workplace diverse. Following the workshop, 72% or respondents agreed with this statement. This indicates that the workshop not only provided with the necessary skills for workplace conflict solving but increased awareness of diversity, first step towards acceptance of the biases associated to it. Respondents stated that they are now thinking more about diversity issues, defining diversity more broadly, and strategizing ways in which to assert their rights. At the same time, multiple respondents reported a need for continued training on how to communicate effectively in the workplace.

**Workshop Materials**

Workshop materials were posted on the Diversity Module page of the Professional Development Training Program website, including agenda, slides, problem-solving scenarios, and recommended reading. The workshop agenda and problem-solving scenarios (developed by Dr. Hippensteele) are included at the end of this report.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF EDVENTURES FUNDING
EDventures funding covered food and beverages to sustain workshop participants throughout a full day of intense conversations. Funding also covered the workshop program, which included participants’ biographies, and was distributed prior to the workshop to allow participants to know more about one another. To C-MORE participants traveling from outside of Hawai’i, we offered one night of hotel accommodation and the balance of the day’s per diem, in order to persuade them to spend one February day indoors (instead of enjoying the beautiful Hawai’i weather). For the large part, this incentive was not claimed, and therefore our project came in well under budget at <50% of the original EDventures award. We are certain that the ability to offer this complementary funding helped us to recruit participants who came from outside of the state.
**Effective Communication and Team-Building Workshop Draft Agenda**

Sunday, Feb 23, 2013 (8:30 am – 4:00 pm)
Hawai‘i Convention Center, Room 319AB, Honolulu, HI

8:30-9:00 am- Continental breakfast (provided) & sign-in

**Session A: Developing Problem-Solving Skills**

9:00 – 9:45 am- Welcome
We will (a) introduce C-MORE’s research and education missions; (b) define diversity and introduce its impact on team-building; and (c) invite participants to introduce themselves.

9:45 – 10:15 am- Team-Building Exercises (Professional Development Organizing Committee)
PDOC will lead short exercises to build trust among participants, modeled after the University of California Santa Cruz’s Diversity and Inclusion Certificate Program.

10:15 – 10:30 am- Break

10:30 am – 12:00 pm- Workplace Problem-Solving (Dr. Susan Hippensteele)
Groups of four will discuss different real-life workplace scenarios such as a cultural misunderstanding, a research collaboration conflict, or a situation involving implicit bias. Groups answer the questions: (a) What is the issue causing the conflict? (b) What is the appropriate institutional response; and (c) Where would you go for help or advice? Following brief reports from the groups, Dr. Hippensteele will lead a large group discussion about “best practices” for conflict resolution.

12:00-1:00 pm- Discussions continue over lunch (provided)

**Session B: Overcoming Professional Challenges: Stories from Mentors**
Speakers will share experiences with respect to overcoming professional challenges related to diversity and effective communication.

1:00 – 2:00 pm-
Introduction to Panel Discussion
Speaker 1: Dr. Patricia Cooper
*Dean of Graduate Education (Retired), University of Hawai‘i Mānoa*
Speaker 2: Dr. Ricardo Letelier,
*Professor of Ocean Ecology and Biogeochemistry, Oregon State University*

2:00-2:20 pm- Break

2:20 – 3:00 pm-
Speaker 3: Dr. Sonya Dyhrman
*Associate Professor, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University*
Speaker 4: Dr. Angelique White
*Assistant Professor, Ocean Ecology and Biogeochemistry, Oregon State University*

3:00 – 3:30 pm – Question-and-Answer Session
3:30 – 4:00 pm – Farewell and Workshop Evaluations
Instructions: This problem-solving exercise is designed to provide participants with opportunities to assess and respond to workplace conflicts typical in academic and research environments. The scenarios were developed with input from members of the C-MORE community and while constructed from real-life situation(s), they are not based on specific situations or incidents involving C-MORE.

Please read each scenario carefully and then work with members of your small group for **10 minutes** to identify answers to the questions posed below. After 10 minutes we will reconvene as a large group and each small group will share their responses as part of a large group discussion to develop a ‘best practices’ response to the scenario.

**SCENARIO 1:**

Dominique earned her Ph.D. from a prestigious European university and was recently hired into a staff research scientist position at your campus. She arrived a few weeks ago and you recently heard through ‘the grapevine’ that Dominique has questions about her salary. You work with a different lab but are aware that there have been pay equity problems among staff and faculty in recent years; several men from the US have been hired at salaries higher than those offered to women and non-US citizens. You are aware that pay equity is a controversial issue and differences in level of compensation can sometimes be explained legitimately. You also know that pay inequity based on gender or other bias can be toxic to the work environment and that the reputation of your campus will be harmed if illegitimate pay inequities are present and not addressed. Dominique has not come to you directly for advice but she has been asking around and you have heard that she is not happy with the information she is receiving. At least one person has apparently advised her not to ‘rock the boat’ since she’s not a US citizen. What, if anything, should you do?

(a) What is the source of conflict in this scenario?

(b) What is the appropriate institutional response, if any?

(c) Where should you go for help or advice?

**SCENARIO 2:**

Maegen and Jahan met in graduate school and are expecting their first child in a few weeks. Both are expecting to complete and defend their dissertations this semester and
are on the job market; Maegen has been short-listed for a faculty position already and Jahan is being considered for a post-doc at the same institution. Your department has been supportive of Maegen’s desire to graduate on-time despite giving birth shortly before her scheduled defense. As her delivery date draws closer, Maegen and Jahan realize they will both need to take some time off and share responsibility for child care immediately following the birth of their baby in order for Maegen to be able to meet her deadlines. They develop a work-share plan and decide to meet with their respective committee chairs to negotiate some time away from campus for each of them to care for their newborn. Both are very nervous: Maegen is worried that her advisor is going to think she is not ‘up to the task’ of being both a scientist and a mother while Jahan is concerned that his chair is not going to support his request and that he might not be able to rely on his advisor for a positive job reference if he pushes the issue. How should they proceed?

(a) What is the source of conflict in this scenario?

(b) What is the appropriate institutional response, if any?

(c) Where should you go for help or advice?

**SCENARIO 3:**

Dr. Boren, a senior professor on your campus, leads one of the most productive and highly regarded research teams in your field and is one of the most sought after mentors in your area of specialization. You just moved onto tenure-track from a post-doc position on the Boren team after working with her for 3 years. For the past 6 months you have been preparing manuscript drafts based on a now completed project with the assumption that you will be first author on the resulting publications. During your last meeting with her, Dr. Boren mentioned that she was going to redistribute workload among the junior faculty, post-docs and graduate students on her team and authorship of a couple of the papers you’ve been working on would likely change. She did not elaborate. You wanted to ask what she meant and whether you would be first author on the publications you’ve been developing, but you were concerned that such a question would not be well received. You can’t afford to alienate Dr. Boren but you need to retain authorship on the papers in order to show output for the work you’ve been doing for the past 3 years while applying for your own independent funding. What are your options?

(a) What is the source of conflict in this scenario?

(b) What is the appropriate institutional response, if any?

(c) Where should you go for help or advice?