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Rapport on the Conflict Resolution Process at Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

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Introduction

From January to approximately September 2023, the Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution (DCCR) has been assisting the Department of Psychology at University of Copenhagen with various inputs to help resolve an ongoing conflict affecting many students and employees at the department.

Purpose

The purpose of the report is both to document the conflict resolution process, and to make it easy for students, employees, and the management to obtain an overview of the activities undertaken, which many of them – but not all - have participated in. Additionally, the reader can obtain insight into the process results obtained. However, the purpose is not to assess progress in regard to the work environment and cooperation.

Principles

There are three important principles guiding DCCR work namely voluntary participation, DCCR is the third party neutral, and finally conversations are confidential unless the stakeholders want to be open about their content. For that reason, content of conversations including agreements made during mediations are not revealed in this report. Additionally, a few employees found it too difficult or futile to participate in some of the planned conflict resolution activities but participated in other conflict resolution activities. Thus, the principle of voluntary participation was respected.

Content

The report contains a main chapter listing the conflict resolution activities undertaken and a short chapter on preliminary process-results and follow-up recommendations.



Overview of the Conflict Resolution Activities

From January to September 2023, the following conflict resolution activities have been undertaken in order to assist the stakeholders resolve the conflict. Additionally, a number of planning, sparring and coordination activities took place, and a number of short status reports were produced in the process. The management has kept department employees updated about the conflict resolution process on a running basis.

1. Meeting between DCCR and the management to plan initiation activities (January 2023).
2. In order to develop a thorough process-design the following was initiated:
 - Reading and analysing existing often publicly available material regarding the conflict including the blockade and various open letters sent by students and lectures (January/February).
 - Five group conversations with the purpose of understanding the key elements of the conflict and thus develop a process design. Additionally, the explorative questions asked during the conversations might have created some reflections regarding the conflict among the participants. Furthermore, the conversations functioned in some cases as pre-mediation meetings. The groups participating were: The management, the HUM-group, a group of students from Psykrådet, the student members of the Study Board, the VIP members of the Study Board and the teaching group in Developmental Psychology (February and March).
 - Completion of the process design, dialogue with the management about the design, and subsequent planning of mediation and other activities (February and March).
3. One dialogue session between the management and stakeholders from the course in Development Psychology. The dialogue resulted in a number of agreements between the parties (March).
4. Two mediation sessions between the management and the HUM-group. The mediation resulted in a number of agreements between the parties (March).
5. Two mediation sessions (March and May 2023) between the management and a group of students, some of which are or have been active in the “Psykråd”. The mediation resulted in several possible activities developed by the parties under the headline “how can students get influence on study content including how the Study Board can obtain a wide legitimacy?” This included already existing ideas within the existing organisational framework as well as new ideas. The mentioned headline relates to the following needs of the participants: Being heard, having influence and quality education. The below points were discussed:
 - a. The students discuss how they can write to the lecturers (acknowledge that some lectures are very affected by the conflict)
 - b. Acknowledge that the development of psychology at KU is ALSO based on choices (not a given) – agree that we disagree.



- c. Clarify: When are the students part of 1) a decision-making, 2) a hearing, or 3) an information process (clarify specific levels of influence). The Level of influence is indicated in relation to some of the activities below in line with the above-mentioned needs of the participants: Being heard, having influence and quality education.
- d. Should we do list election ("listevalg") for the Study Board or not?
- e. Should the Study Board have a representative from each cluster? (Level of influence: decision-making).
- f. Announce Study Board meetings for all students to know that they take place and thus give them an opportunity to "sit in" and listen (Level of influence: information).
- g. Identify easy ways for the students to evaluate content and didactics, and thus increasing representativity (Level of influence: decision-making or hearing).
- h. Currently, evaluation is by some not deemed valuable ("værdifuld") in decision-making. Therefore, look for inspiration from AAU's evaluation methodology - not so tough (Level of influence: decision-making or hearing)
- i. Study Board develops clear procedures in connection to evaluation of pensum (level of influence: hearing).
- j. Develop a mailbox concerning "Ideas on how to promote the social and the academic study environment" A mail concerning this is sent to the students (Level of influence: Hearing).
- k. Identify ways to create more inclusivity in the "Psykråd" (Level of influence: hearing in relation to the department's decisions).
- l. Newsletter on the Study Board's discussions and decisions (Level of influence: information).
- m. Students and employees discuss in a facilitated setting various academic ("faglige") and social subjects together (Level of influence: hearing).
- n. Academic ("faglige") sessions where lecturers discuss various perspectives – all students and employees are welcome (Level of influence: hearing).
- o. The management participates in "psykrådsmøder" – Q&A (Level of influence: information and hearing).
- p. Students participate in meetings with coordinators ("fagkoordinatører") and discuss content.
- q. Unvote ("urafstemning") among students concerning "faglighed" (Level of influence: hearing). Input from science theory (videnskabsteori) instructors to Brady regarding pensum, e.g., a prioritised list (hearing). Signe talks to Brady about this and sees the students' input. The students meet with Brady again.

6. Conversations with a group of students who were less active in the blockade (March).

7. Meeting between DCCR and the management to introduce Deep Democracy as a methodology to create inclusive decision-making processes. It was discussed that the management and the Study Board as well as "Psykrådet" could use elements of or the whole methodology in their work (May 2023).

8. Planning and facilitation of a conflict resolution codex workshop for all employees at the department resulting in a long list of ideas concerning such a codex. The purpose of the codex is to agree on "how we resolve and prevent conflicts at the department and clarifying the roles in these activities?" (May

and June). Furthermore, the group developing the final draft codex will receive support from DCCR in August and/or September.

9. A dialogue and semi-mediation session in the clinical section with representatives of the existing and new (HUM-group) members (June). The mediation resulted in a number of agreements between the parties.
10. Planning with and training of members of “Psykrådet” in inclusive decision-making the “Deep Democracy style” possibly August and/or October.



Preliminary Process-Results and Follow-up

This report is not an evaluation of the conflict resolution process. Neither is it assessing changes that have or have not occurred with regards to conflict behaviour and understanding of other groups, or participants' conceptions of changes in the work environment or cooperation between the parties.

So far, the process-results of the conflict resolution activities are simply (yet importantly) a number of agreements made between various stakeholders and draft elements in a conflict resolution codex for the Department.

For the conflict resolution process to be sustainable and have the desired impact, it is necessary for the department - students, employees, and management together - to continue and deepen the conflict resolution process. This includes follow up on the agreements made during the above-mentioned mediations and completing and implementing the coming conflict resolution codex.

Whether or not DCCR will continue to support the department in this process besides the above-mentioned activities (no. 8 and 10) is yet to be determined. Depending on the progress created by the conflict parties in the weeks and months to come, the following activities could be useful:

- Parties revisit and follow-up on agreements made during the mediation sessions shortly after the summer break to assess what still needs to be done. This can either be done individually or in meetings between the stakeholders - maybe both.
- The conflict resolution codex is completed and implemented.
- A group that follows the future conflict resolution process at the department including implementation of the codex etc. is formed or an existing forum is given the task.
- Testing whether Deep Democracy can be a supporting tool to enhance the experience of having influence on the development of psychology at University of Copenhagen.
- A dialogue between the management and Psykrådet will continue in order to tackle future disagreements and prevent conflict escalation.
- The integration of the HUM-group into the Clinical Section is carefully facilitated.

As stated in the letter concerning the conflict resolution design sent to all employees at the department, the conflict resolution initiative will only succeed if all parties:

- Take responsibility for conflict management.
- Are willing to contribute to change.
- Have the courage to talk about the vulnerable aspects and to see their own part in the conflict.
- Engage in dialogues where they make an effort to understand the other party and make themselves understood.
- Act as agreed.