Collaboration and Conflict.

University of Guelph Graduate Skills Development Conference, March 2021

Transcript:

[Jason Dodd]

Alright, so hello everyone. Thank you for your patience.

[Shannon Rushe]

Alright. Cool, well let's get started. Jason are you able to share your screen or would you like me to share mine?

[Jason Dodd]

You know what I had to close Chrome to get in here but I can just pull it back up pretty quickly. Alright I got it.

[Shannon Rushe]

So while Jason is getting everything set up, I just wanted to say a quick hello, and welcome, so thank you so much for joining us for the second day of our grad pathways skill development conference. My name is Shannon. I'm one of the conference organizers, as well as luckily getting to present with Jason today, so I'm excited to be here and thanks to you folks for coming out on the second day and joining us, and apologies for some of those sort of technical issues right there at the beginning. Jason's just getting his screen ready to go and we'll get started. And so this session is about collaboration and conflict. As I mentioned my name is Shannon Rushe. I'm a Learning Specialist in Learning Services and I also have Jason Dodd here with me as well, who is also a Learning Specialist and the coordinator of the Student Athlete Mentorship Program on campus. So let's just jump into things here. So we wanted to start out by talking a little bit about where collaboration happens. So where does that happen you know, in our roles as graduate students, where do we imagine that it's going to happen either in our futures in the industry or our futures, further in academia? So we're going to ask that you go to menti.com. Some of you folks have probably seen this before, but menti.com and use that code 86567893. I'm going to just put that in the chat as well.

[Jason Dodd]

So you should see that that code pop up at the top of my screen now as well 86567893. Everything look okay, Shannon?

[Shannon Rushe]

That looks good. The code is also in the chat there. Alrighty, so hopefully people have had a chance to to jump into that that menti there. So we're just asking if you don't mind dropping in that menti, or if you're not able to get in there, you can also put it in the chat. Right now, in your experience as a graduate student, where is collaboration happening for you? We'll take a minute for people to drop their suggestions in there.

[pause]

[Jason Dodd]

Alright, starting to come together. Thanks for the input.

[Shannon Rushe]

Alright, thank you some ideas dropping in here already.

[Jason Dodd]

I love 'stats help'. I was talking to grad student yesterday. He's like I'm going to text my friend in the stats Department. He's going to tell me what to do with that. Everybody gets to that point and texts her friend in the stats department.

[Shannon Rushe]

Alright, so great. So we've got a couple of things up here, so obviously within labs, if you're working in a lab environment, so specifically between PhDs, postdocs and sort of the younger students to assist in writing. Collaboration is happening with your advisors with your lab mates in departmental clubs. As Jason mentioned, also getting some stats help. I think you know collaborating with others who have, you know, different areas of expertise. Mentorships again in seminars, working on group projects. Even sometimes in one's free time that would be here. You know what in your own free time, how that's happening as well as in part time work as well.

Great yeah, thanks so much. So I mean I think one of the things that were often not always aware of is how much collaboration is actually happening in grad school. I think often graduate studies can sometimes feel like a bit of a lonely venture and a bit of an isolated experience, especially this year as we are, you know, most of us are remote. Even if we do work in labs we're not really allowed to be in the same space with other people. So I think that we often find that it's kind of a lonely experience and don't anticipate a lot of collaboration happening in grad school, but there are definitely places where it does. So Jason, if you want to just head to our next mentee question...

[Jason Dodd]

I do Shannon, but I also wanted to kind of foreshadow the conflict portion of where we are because advisors came up there, right? So advisors can be either like a source of great collaboration or great pain. So I think we can maybe even keep that relationship in mind is probably the most important relationship you'll have as a grad student when it comes to your productivity and completing your thesis. So when we start talking about how you're interacting with others and your needs and their needs and everything else like that, that might be a good one to keep in mind.

[Shannon Rushe]

Definitely. Alright, so this is our next one, so again another opportunity for you to drop some ideas on the menti. Where do we envision collaboration happening in industry or in our future in academia? So we'll give people a minute or two in there.

[pause]

[Jason Dodd]

Great, our man Zack saving the day. My PC won't talk to my Apple Airpods. Apparently. I still don't know if I'm using them or not. Who knows?

[Shannon Rushe]

Any other ways that we feel, and I know that this one can be kind of tricky since we don't all know where we might be headed after Graduate School for heading into industry or if we're heading into academia, are there any other places where people feel as though there might be opportunities for collaboration.

[pause]

[Shannon Rushe]

Projects everywhere. Yep definitely.

[Jason Dodd]

I was on a leadership called the other night with a bunch of folks from RBC and they just couldn't stop talking about the important of that skill, of being able to develop that skill, but also talked about that skill in the interview and demonstrate that when it comes to getting yourself into that next position in the future.

[Shannon Rushe]

Absolutely, yeah. Basically everywhere even on your coffee break, for sure. I'll be honest. I think one of the things that I miss most about being on campus are those coffee breaks because it is amazing how much you know project planning and creativity and decision making often happens in those coffee breaks. So definitely collaboration is happening everywhere. Great, thank you.

So you can continue to add to that and we can take a peek at it later, but I'll ask Jason to come back to our presentation. So for those of you who were here yesterday for our keynote speaker Ivan, one of the things that he spoke to us about was our why statements, and we had a little bit of an opportunity to create some of those. So one of the things that we did want you to just think about, and if you thought about it and you want to put it in the chat, you're welcome too, but, we're not going to require that for now, but it might be worthwhile for you as you're thinking about your role in the various teams that you're on now, whether that's you know part of Club leadership or it could be a project in a lab, if you are maybe mentoring undergraduate students at this point, what is your role on the team and what are your why statements? If anyone has one that was already related to teamwork, that's fantastic, but it is also interesting to think about the things that you believe that you want, or that you want to be known for in your in your collaborative projects and your collaborative work. So something just to keep in mind as we continue to move throughout this presentation. And as I said, as you're thinking about it, and as we're chatting, if anything comes to mind and you've been able to complete a why statement in relation to your role in teams, then feel free to drop it in the chat. But I'm going to pass things over to Jason now to talk us through some information about teamwork, working in teams, and the types of conflicts that we might encounter.

[Jason Dodd]

Awesome so yeah, thanks for that and in that context I like that idea of you know who you are isn't just about your own goals and achieving them, but it's about how you're going to interact with other people and maybe how you're going to see yourself through some of these conflicts. So basically we, Shannon and I, when we talk about academic group work is something that we work on with students that kind of all levels through undergrad and grad degrees, and we really see three consistent sources of conflict when it comes to group work or teamwork. And again, I like the idea of teamwork a little bit better because it's not like I just got lumped together and I have to do this. But like a lot of things we're going to accomplish more. Together everyone achieves more when we work in teams. So as we go through that, three real main sources of conflict tend to arise for us. So I want to spend a couple minutes talking about those. And brainstorming, maybe a couple of ideas, understand them a little bit, but as a group, brainstorming some ideas on how to manage each one of these three sources. So I've got slides with pictures that I really want to show you, but we're actually

going to have this conversation, I'm going to switch the screen back to menti and hopefully get some of your ideas on there. So the three sources that we're going to talk about the first one is logistical. How does that lead to conflict within a group, and challenges and frustrations?

The second one is intrapersonal, so within yourself, how you or individuals in the group feel about themselves heading into group work? It could be a fear or frustration or any baggage, or just generally everyone's a little bit different. We need to understand people strengths and get that as part of our team that we build.

And then the third one that we'll run into is interpersonal, right? That individual, between people, that conflict that tends to arise. So as I mentioned, I'm going to take us back over to Menti. It'll be the same poll, it's just the next question.

And if we go there, the first one I want to ask about is that logistical conflict. So when these arise or before they arise, what tools can can we use? So when it comes to communication, time management, delegation of roles, staying organized. Have you found any effective strategies or apps or tools or anything that will help resolve or prevent these logistic conflicts?

[pause]

Calendly, you know I've never used that, Shannon you use that right?

[Shannon Rushe]

Yeah, Calendly is my favorite calendar tool. Absolute favorite.

[Jason Dodd]

Yeah, because it's like I've still like I have a doodle poll here. Another multiple calendars and stuff that's like one spot right? Clear, firm communication, advocate for your needs. What do we need? When do you need to work together? Who's going to do what? And yeah, before dividing people into teams is a really good one. So if we look at the different spots you know on those last two questions where you may need to work within a team you know, is your advisor taking these things into consideration when they're deciding who's going to work on what projects? Who's going to work together, who's going to take the lead on that, and work within those strengths? So either, is that something you can do as you become a more senior person on your research team? Or is that something that your advisor is already thinking about as we work through? Setting things up beforehand, descriptions of what's supposed to be done.

Another thing that kind of one of our sure cures for this is all kinds of project management skills. You know, your own leadership skills as you're reflecting and thinking and building those through opportunities like this conference. Other tools, right? Project management tools: you could use Slack, you could use Calendly, you can use Asana or different versions of that, but ultimately it is just about that communication. The other thing that can be useful at the start is to talk a little bit about accountability so you know that's going to fit better in some situations than others. But again, if you can, as a team member, build up that sense of accountability on everyone's going to pull their own weight, and you know those, if this doesn't happen then this will be the result of that. So if they're bringing coffees to the next meeting or whatever little things come about, then it can hopefully help you hold people accountable because they've committed to it and we've gone as far as helping people create group contracts and things like that in order to help hold everyone accountable. But those may or may not be necessary, but ultimately you guys definitely have that right idea when it comes to

communication and doing everything up front so that we know what expectations are as we move forward.

The next conflict we tend to see quite a bit of is that interpersonal one. Essentially, this is the idea of finding, finding people strengths, creating opportunities for everyone to contribute, recognizing that not everyone is going to be jumping to the front of the line and throwing their ideas out there. Some people are more analytical or slower thinkers are going to wait until they have all the information before they share their thoughts. So how can you facilitate to make sure all voices are heard within that? Another one we see a lot of in academia in grad school everywhere really, you know this, all of us have it to some degree, is impostor phenomenon. So that's another area where Shannon and I have done, you know, full hour long workshops to help dig into that a little bit, but do you feel like you belong? If you're unsure if you belong are you going to be willing to share your ideas within a group? And again, that's the you not just as an individual, but also for your group mates.

So do you have any strategies to manage that interpersonal conflict that people might be struggling with and affect their ability to contribute to the group? I want, oh, perfect thank you. I was just saying I can't see the little speech bubbles the dot dot dot that someone's creating some ideas. So yeah, finding strengths, being honest with yourself about your own strengths and weaknesses. Thank you. That's a very honest answer and really appreciate you sharing that one with us. So finding those roles and again, playing to your strengths so you can be most efficient. You don't have to do the things you're not good at because again, you've got lots of strength and ability to work with. Understanding perfectionism, right? Perfectionism is a complex beast. It's not just that you want to have the final edit and make sure all the commas aren't spliced in the group paper.

There's a lot of beliefs that can affect our ability to work together, so fear of failure is definitely closely linked to that,and being willing to take risks within a group. Being willing to relinquish some control in order to see what other people can do and push yourself in directions, and have that growth mindset. Really tough, difficult things, but I think when it comes to collaborating in a group, understanding your own interpersonal struggles, and how or not struggles, interpersonal... what's happening and how that affects your ability to collaborate with others, but also recognizing that everyone else sitting around that table may have lots going on beneath the surface. So, being friendly and able to work forward. I think that's actually one of our good - I'm having flashbacks to some of those teamwork sessions we used to run Shannon right? - but yeah, you're not here to be best friends with everybody. You need to coexist, or you need to get the project done, right? You don't have to be going for coffees on weekends and things like that, but you do when you have a task in mind, just need to coexist long enough to get that done. And I again that third point is great too, right? I think that understanding, again, we are here to work on a project, but also if you have a true understanding of where people are, that can reduce a lot of conflict and that gets into the interpersonal piece as well. So, if I'm showing up late every morning. to work and Shannon looks at that and just thinks I'm useless and I'm not pulling my weight, maybe she doesn't understand that you know I wasn't just sleeping till 9:00 o'clock, but I was trying to get three kids out the door and get them to school and in order to do that I can barely take care of myself, so that's quite a challenge for me. So my work day is going to shift a little bit and I'm going to work from 9:15, but I'm doing other things to pull my weight in other ways, but if she understands that she's going to be more likely to work together and a lot of that, even just cultural awareness, interpersonal awareness can, can really be useful for us to have that empathy for other people and know where people are coming from in order to again not be

bitter about the conflict, but to be able to discuss, you know - are things like that affecting our group's ability to work and get things done? or are they something we can work around because we know that everyone is kind of pulling there?

Alright, and then our third and most pervasive piece is that interpersonal conflict. So have you picked up anything along the way, when you do have conflict, when someone's fumbling to get his headphones to work and can't figure out how many times he hits the unmute button how to how to get the tech to work? How does Shannon keep from getting frustrated and letting that affect our positivity for the day? Shannon, how'd you do that, while we're soliciting some other responses?

[Shannon Rushe]

Sure. Well, I mean, I'll be honest, I think part of it is what we were just talking about in terms of understanding the other person's perspective. And I think it's easy to kind of glance over and let tech issues slide. I think that that's out of everyone's control and we've had to deal with them so often in the last year that that kind of thing doesn't personally doesn't frustrate me. Oh yeah, definitely. I think that that there is, there's always going to be some sort of conflict, usually interpersonal conflict as Jason mentioned, if you're working together on something, or if you're collaborating, so any strategies that anyone has, if you want to drop them in the mentimeter, or you want to drop them in the chat, it would be good to hear what strategies you folks have used.

[Jason Dodd]

And some definitely have come out before right when we talk logistical. If we lay out ahead of time, what expectations are, if we've got something like that group contract that if statement that everyone agrees to. If someone is not pulling their weight, I want to be told that directly and privately and not called out in front of the group. Then we know how to how to deal with certain individuals as things like that happen. So the planning definitely helps. The intrapersonal piece: taking that time to know them, to know how they prefer to be led, how you can work together, definitely makes a big piece.

Alright, let's work our way backwards here. Having breaks, for sure setting, setting that right amount of time, expectations. Really good strategies in the middle there. Your soft and hard deadlines. Take some time, right? Take care of yourself. And step away from the issue. Another really important one is a simple one, right, is to try and address the issue, not the person. You know, you can use I statements instead of you statements. You know "Jason, it really effects my ability to deliver a good presentation when you show up 7 minutes late and can't talk on your tech." So now I understand how it's affecting Shannon and all of you. So maybe next time I'll get organized a little bit before I show up. Those kind of comments and then I'm not as offended by what she has to say. She can talk about the issue rather than saying I'm a terrible person because I can't work my tech, that I don't understand.

That first, again, another really honest answer. Thanks for sharing that. Right? So often when times are stressful, if we end up know whether we know we're stressed or not, we tend to take it out on those closest to us and our loved ones, especially now you know when our loved ones may be with us 24 hours a day. So in that case I think it does get back into a lot of our stress management and personal management strategies. That intrapersonal piece. So maybe you can catch that stress before you take it out on your husband. Or again, maybe we can reflect and identify the real root of the issue and make a deliberate choice on confronting the issue rather than letting it overtake us and our stress and ultimately affecting our loved ones around us. So Shannon, any thoughts on those?

[Shannon Rushe]

Yeah, Olivia also dropped something in the chat here, that having mediators or sort of neutral ground people, and where you can and taking a step back to collect your thoughts so it's not as emotionally charged. Those are great suggestions, Olivia, thank you for those.

[Jason Dodd]

Alright so. I'm just, learning and continuing to impress with my tech skills. Alright, so I want to unpack this just a little bit further and then Shannon is going to talk, with moving back to Shannon, talk about a few things. So there are a couple of folks named Thomas and Kilmann and they've come up with actually a conflict mode instrument and there's a full diagnostic test you can go through. I think there's a cost associated with it, but I think often just through a little bit of self reflection and looking inward we can determine maybe how we approach things. But, you go through this whole test and like any of these good standardized tests, it then spits you into your group. It's good news, Shannon, you are an avoiding person, so that's not the goal. I think it's understanding that we're dynamic and we're going to deal with different situations in different ways. In fact, I think a lot of conflict demands that we deal with them differently from one to the next.

So there's five different responses to conflict that they've come up with here, which is what you see in the green, the green square, and they run on two different spectrums. So the first axis there, the X axis is your level of cooperativeness, which is an awkward word. But essentially, that is how much do you value the relationship? So if you highly value the relationship, that's where you're going to get into things where you're accommodating and collaborating and working with that other person because you really value that that relationship. And on the other side, on the assertiveness side, that is eventually, essentially how much do you want to accomplish this task in that way? So if Shannon didn't value my input and really wanted to get this thing up and running, she might have just completely thrown me under the bus and prevented me from sharing and gone on and done that herself. She could have been that competing person who's focused solely on getting the task done, and less so. Maybe she chose here to be accommodating because our relationship is so wonderful that she's going to let me fumble around and she thinks we can work through it. Or maybe we end up in a compromise a little bit where it's not quite as smooth as we wanted, but at least we get to work together and go forward.

So again looking at that scale, if neither is important, the task nor the relationship, you can avoid the issue altogether. If again, you're more focused on how we're completing this, that becomes a competing interest. If you are more focused on accommodating, on the relationship, then the task will fall into accommodating. Compromise is right in that murky middle: everyone wins, everyone loses kind of thing. And ultimately what we want to strive for is effective collaboration to jump in there.

So I've got two more menti questions before we move on. I'm curious to know how you deal with conflict. What is your go to? So I mentioned different contexts might lead to, to different responses, depending on what you're working on, but do you tend to fall into one of these these five categories on a more regular basis?

I think if I press that I can see. Cool. Hopefully we can get one or two more responses there. Again, thanks for the honesty, right? Like collaborating stuff to get to. I don't think you as one person can get to be a collaborator by yourself. Compromise, right? It's a way that we can keep everyone happy, but maybe not quite where we want to be. And competing, right? So

that might be back to that first comment about perfectionism and striving to complete things and do a good job.

Look at us. Full of colors, so rainbow of responses, right? Avoiding, right? That's something I mean, I'm still working on that. I'm like 13 years out of grad school and I'm still, you know, trying to get away from avoiding and confronting firm issues and advocating for what I believe in and what's important, right? So again, lots of different ways, lots of different people and how we're all going to look at conflicts and deal with them. But I think, what I think becomes important, is based on you and how you're going to experience that. Hopefully that's again enlightening for all of us that. Again, everyone around the table is going to look at a conflict or a task and how they're going to advocate for it slightly differently.

What about your teammates? So if you're working on a project with folks, how do you prefer that they act? If there's a source of conflict? Would you like them to stick to their guns and be strong and, you know, make a strong argument for things? Do you want them to compromise so you get some of your way, but not quite all your way? Do you want them to avoid it? So you get your way, but you may not know what's happening on their side of things.

[pause]

And then the rhetorical follow up, this is it back to that advisor piece and you know, where is your advisor on this list? Does your advisor support you? Does your visor fall into that category where they are accommodating and they want you to focus on your relationship, in your building, of skills, and then have some direction and input into where you're going? Or are they just a task masker who is telling you, this is what you're going to do, and they don't give you much advocacy within that? And is that what you need for your learning growth and development? Again within your team, within your lab, within your group of researchers, or anyone else you're working with your teaching team, how are you leading and helping them resolve these conflicts and respond to conflicts as they arise?

So thank you for jumping into that part with me. And then, as we think a little bit about yourselves as team leaders, I do want to leave you with this article from Forbes that Joseph Oakman wrote about in the dimensions that deliver high performance and what makes that good leader, right? So back to that reflective question about your why, and who you are, and how you're interacting with other people. Is there a way that you can be that strong leader that has more pull than push. So be inspiring folks around you rather than having to drive them. Resolving conflicts: being direct and catching them before they arise rather than letting them simmer until they become something bigger. Setting goals in the right way that allow for growth and accomplishment and competence as you work through things.

The vision, right? Are people buying into what's there? Are you communicating what you're striving towards and how you're working there? And then, finally, how are you building trust and how do you do that? And he suggests kind of three key pillars to building trust, so one is focusing on the relationship, two is being a reliable source of knowledge or expertise, and the third is being consistent: How you deal day in, day out. So I think that does lead into our next point and diving a little bit into how you're providing feedback to build up those around you.

[Shannon Rushe]

Jason before you head over, we do have a question in the chat that says "can you give a little bit more information about setting stretch goals?"

[Jason Dodd]

Yeah, so I think, that would just be kind of finding the balance in your goal setting, so you know we talk about smart goals and there is a realistic goal as part of that, or achievable goal is part of it. We want to make sure we're, our like goals are outside of our comfort zone, and they're allowing us to stretch and grow and maybe reach our full potential. Whereas if we set goals that are too comfortable or too achievable, we may not quite get there. And when it comes to a team, I think it's about engaging people. So if you can find something that is a little bit out of the ordinary that does kind of stretch them a little bit, then, they you know, when they achieve that goal because they've stretched themselves beyond their comfort zone, not quite beyond their limits, I don't think is what we're going for here, that it engages people to work towards it and has a real sense of accomplishment when we get there.

[Shannon Rushe]

Alrighty. So, as Jason mentioned, there are lots of obviously different types of conflict, and just by the nature of working with others, we're going to engage in conflict. So almost all of the strategies that we just spoke about, that you dropped in the menti or in the chat, to mitigate those conflicts involve clear communication, usually in the form of feedback. So if we are in conflict, it's probably because we disagree, we feel that someone isn't pulling their weight, maybe the work isn't at the standard that we want. And of course one of the ways to communicate our expectations and make change is through feedback. So of course feedback can be positive. Jason, I'm not sure what's going on with your with your screen here. There we go, perfect!

[Jason Dodd]

I'm trying to, I'm trying to get back to the meeting so I can see you guys and the chat, but I can't do it. I'm just going to say.

[Shannon Rushe]

OK, I'll monitor the chat. So I was saying of course obviously feedback can be positive or it can be constructive or sometimes even be criticism. And for most people it's an awkward thing to both give and receive. So whether it's positive or negative for a lot of us it's kind of difficult and maybe a little bit awkward to hear that feedback. So for the next few minutes before we head into our student panel, we'll try to talk a little bit about why that is. Why is it difficult? How you can provide feedback and how you can prepare to receive it as well.

Alright, next slide - awesome alright so. So Interestingly, there is some research that suggests that our brains try to protect us and often shift our perspective to make us think that we're right, even when we're not. So when we're given criticism, our brains can interpret that as a threat. Usually as a threat to our standing in the social order, right? So it's seen by our brains, as I like to call it like by our lizard brains, as a threat to our safety. And as a result our brains try to protect us from that in a couple of ways. The most common way is usually that we get defensive, right? We try to reason away the feedback that we've been given, so you know, that paper that I submitted wasn't great because I pulled an all nighter to work on it if I had had more time, it would have been better. Or, you know, something like, you know, I did get a lot of sleep. I was in a bad mood and that's why I snapped on a coworker. but that's not normally how I am. That's not normally how I interact, right? Like we tend to get defensive and rationalize our behavior. The other interesting thing is that we've probably all heard of the negativity bias, right? That our brains tend to remember negative emotions and negative experiences more strongly than they do positive ones. Unless we make a concentrated effort to remember those positive emotions. So as a result most people remember criticism more

than they remember praise, but the really interesting thing that research is finding recently is that we don't always remember the criticism accurately.

So again, because our brains are trying to protect us from that threat to our safety, we usually change the information, the feedback that you were given. We tend to change that in our memory as opposed to actually changing our own behaviors. So even though we don't always remember the criticism correctly, we often remember it more than praise. So as a result, when we're giving feedback, we do need to think about how to best provide that feedback, especially if it's constructive or if it could be construed as criticism so that people feel safe enough to change their behavior instead of changing the information that we're giving them. So it is possible for the sharing of feedback to be positive. It's even possible for it to become a bonding experience. So let's take a look at how that might be possible and some ways that we can provide feedback.

So one of the most important things as you're getting ready to provide someone with some feedback is actually to check in on your, your purpose. What are your reasons for giving this feedback? And ultimately you only want to give feedback if it's necessary to support that person, to enhance that project, maybe to reduce the potential negative result, you know, like safety? Of course, we're always sort of kind of focused on our work, we want our work to be up to a certain standard, we want that manuscript to get accepted, things like that. Or if you're in a mentoring role.

So I think one of the things that's really important for us, providing feedback is before you send that email or you have that conversation with someone or you send that quick chat in teams, be sure to check in on your reasons for providing that feedback. So reframing it in your own mind as an opportunity, or as an opportunity for you to support a colleague, to support the project or enhance the project that you're working on, you're more likely to communicate that in a way that's more constructive if you've taken that time to pause and think about your reasons. If you're finding that you are getting defensive, if you're quickly reacting to a frustration, what you might want to do instead of immediately sending that feedback is taking an opportunity to pause and reflect until you're in a different mindset.

Alright, so what are some tips for providing feedback? So the big one of course, and Jason mentioned this already, is to focus on the behavior, not the person. So again, we want to make sure that the things that we are providing feedback on are about behaviors as opposed to someone's identity. So it's important here to be specific about something that you observed, right? So you could say, even if it is something like, you know "Jason, I've noticed that you've been late to our meetings the past couple of times", right? Like that is about Jason, but it's about his behavior. It's not about him as a person. I'm not saying you know, "Jason, you're so, you're so irresponsible or you have no regard for anyone else's time." I'm not making claims about his character or his identity, I'm making a statement about what I've observed. And you want to focus on things that are actionable, things that can be changed, right?

So again, you know that old rule if you're going to tell somebody something you know don't say anything that they can't change. So if you know someone has food in their teeth, sure, that's something that they can quickly change. But if something has somebody has something you know, let's say a mark on their face, that's a scar you don't want to point that out because they can't change that, right? So focus on things that are actionable. One of the other things that you wanted to do when you're providing feedback is to lead with questions. So instead of jumping right into I think you should... start with how would you improve or "what are some ways that I can support you?" Or "can we take some time to reflect? How do you think that

this project can be improved?" So again focusing on that behavior and leading with those questions. One of the other things that we talk a lot about when we're providing feedback is injecting positivity. And most of us kind of go back to that sandwich method that, that is kind of an old school approach to providing feedback where you say something positive, something constructive or critical, and then something positive again at the end. And honestly, I think a lot of people at this point see through that, and it's not always the most helpful, but you can still inject positivity into your conversations by saying subtle things, so subtle changes in your language, things like: How can we make this even better? That is saying like, OK, this is already good, how do we make it even better? You know, you might say something that like I think you did a really good job with getting this in on time, but there are some changes that I'd like to make right? So you can inject that positivity without always having to resort to that sandwich method.

Of course, another thing that's important, and I imagine that you are all aware of this, and we've been alluding to this a lot, is to provide suggestions instead of criticisms. So again, trying to phrase things like "have you considered including...", "one thing that worked well for me is...", "have you tried..., right? Statements like that that are much more about suggestions as opposed to just saying things like "this is terrible" or "this needs to be better", right? Like that doesn't give me any way to improve, and I know we've all had those comments probably from our advisors from team members, and it's really frustrating to get that information because you're like, OK. Well, what do you want me to do? How do I do better? And I think that as we're providing feedback, we can be those people who provide suggestions instead of just criticisms. So Jason next slide.

So in the next slide I'm going to show you one way that you can actually phrase your feedback in sort of this objective manner. So what you want to do is state what you observed. Right, so whatever that behavior is, again focusing on the behavior or the situation, not the person or their character. Provide your suggestion. So if we're using Jason's example, I might say, "hey, Jason, I notice that you've been late to a couple of our meetings over the past few weeks. Should we maybe adjust to a new time that would suit your needs better?", right? Or suit your schedule better, and then you give your rationale for that suggestion, right? So you might want to say "I want to make sure that we're getting the full use of the hour that we have together on this project, so I'm willing to shift our meeting time in order to suit your schedule so that we can make the most of that". And then, of course, you also want to provide or brainstorm an example, right? So this suggestion that I just gave is not not great because we kind of know what that might be, but I might say that point, you know, like you know, instead of getting there at 9, you're getting there at 9:15. Can we just start the meeting at 9:15 instead, right? So phrasing your feedback in this way is really focusing on that observation, the suggestion, and then is also giving a rationale and an example for why you think that things should be different and how that person can actually move forward. And more often than not, when people are given rationales and reasoning as well as examples for how they can move forward, they're more likely to take that feedback on and actually try to engage in behaviors that are going to then change that experience for both of you.

So because we don't - what I was going to do with his practice that - we'll skip over that, but I encourage you to try that in your own time. Even if you want to just provide it to yourself for the time being. OK. So now that we've talked a little bit about providing feedback, let's discuss hearing it, which in a lot of ways can be the harder thing to do. And, I think that for a lot of us probably we're in situations where we're hearing feedback maybe a little bit more than giving it. So one of the things that you can do to help make hearing feedback a little bit easier for

you is to ask for feedback often. So of course, one of the things that's going to make it easier for you to hear feedback is if you're getting it consistently. So making feedback part of your process actually makes it easier to hear. So if in your meetings your advisor, for example, if you are always asking for feedback, getting that feedback, it takes this - it kind of takes the sting out of getting that feedback because you're used to getting it. You've been exposed to getting feedback.

One of the other things that's really important is to think about who you want feedback from, so naturally you don't have really much of a say in whether or not your advisor gives you feedback, but are there other people, maybe within your department or in similar departments, that you could be asking for feedback? Could you ask, you know, another graduate student that you trust that you feel is credible? Trying to think a little bit about who you want that feedback from and actually asking for it. And also avoiding asking for feedback from people who either are not going to be able to provide any sort of relevant, valuable feedback, or people who are not credible, right? So I mean, it's always good to get an outside perspective on things, but those people might not really understand your projects. They might not understand your purpose and so you want to be working, sort of within a certain group of people that are credible to the type of feedback that you're looking for. One of the other things that you can do as you're receiving feedback, or you're preparing to hear feedback is to integrate or ask for time to reflect.

So most people can only handle one piece of critical information at a time. So if you are asking for feedback, let's say from your advisor in a weekly or biweekly meeting, allow for some time for you to reflect on that. Don't always feel as though you need to respond to that feedback immediately. Recognize that tone can be really difficult, and we often project tone in written communication, but it may be worthwhile for you to take notes yourself on the feedback that you've been given, or ask for a written summary after a conversation so that you can go back and reflect on that feedback as opposed to just reacting to it in the moment. And that reaction usually, as we talked about earlier, is the defence mechanism, right? Our brains are trying to protect us because our safety is feeling threatened, so we immediately get defensive. We immediately rationalize. As opposed to really hearing that feedback and trying to understand that and make some change as a result.

One of the other things too, as you're preparing for feedback, is to take credit for your mistakes and for your growth. So one of the things that I would encourage you to do in your meetings, your group meetings as a project, your lab meetings, meetings with your advisor, is have opportunities to discuss your successes and your challenges. And if you do that consistently, you'll find that it's easier for you to receive that praise and talk about those accomplishments, but also talk about the challenges and solicit suggestions for how you could improve. So you could do things like feedback circles, you could do wins and worries, you could do a stop, start, continue, there's lots of different options in there.

And so I'm just going to move on to the next slide. So again, if you're going to be asking for feedback or making it a regular part of your meetings with, let's say a manager or an advisor, coming prepared so that you don't get blindsided is really important. So most of us are aware of the things that we could do better, so trying to brainstorm some solution-focused questions that will help you improve, instead of just allowing someone to kind of confirm what you already know without any suggestions for how to move forward, is a really good idea. So there's a couple of suggestions for questions up there on the slide we'll record this and post this in the Grad Skills Certificate so that you can see this at a later date, or I'm happy to share

these afterwards, but these are just some questions that you could use if you're going to be asking for feedback.

So lastly, I just want to talk very quickly about reacting to feedback. So one of the things that I think is important for us to say, especially to graduate students, I think this is really important, is to appreciate the compliments. Appreciate the positive feedback that we get, so in a lot of cultures, including graduate student culture, it's actually very difficult for us to do. We downplay, we ignore, we're uncomfortable with praise. It's really important to embrace it. This is feedback. A compliment is usually someone's way of saying that they want you to continue doing something. So you can ask for specifics if you get a compliment, "what about my paper was good?" or "was there any part of my presentation that really made you think?" Was there any part that really stuck with you, right? You can dig into those compliments to get more actionable information, but definitely don't just - don't just downplay those or set those aside and focus only on the criticisms. Definitely take those compliments because that is a really valuable form of feedback. As I've mentioned a couple of times, pause and reflect before you explain away or rationalize any criticism, even if you're not always going to be in a conversation and reacting to someone verbally, even if it's written, try to take a couple of deep breaths, pause and reflect, and maybe come back to that feedback later if you can.

Another thing that's important to remember is that this is only one person's perspective, so that person may have, as we've noticed, you know, a different approach to the way that we do things. So it's actually more important for us to look for patterns. So again, that's why asking for feedback consistently is important. You want to look for patterns. You also want to create an action plan, so once you've had some feedback, or you've identified some patterns, try to select two or three actions that will help you improve and give yourself a goal for how and when you're going to engage in those actions. And then lastly, of course you want to follow up. So once you've attempted to improve, once you've attempted to enact that action plan, ask for a follow up and see if other people have noticed your progress. So lastly, I know we're coming right down to the wire here. It's kind of perfect timing.

So one of the things that I always like to remind myself is that while you have taken this session and you've got a little bit of information in how to provide feedback, the people that you're getting feedback from may not, right. They may not have any training on how to do this. So this quote always helps me put myself in the right mindset and gives me the space to reflect on what's being asked of me or what actions I can, I can take to move forward. So it's always reminding myself that a complaint is really just a poorly worded request.

So hopefully over the last 45 minutes we've been able to introduce to you some different types of conflicts that you might have, some strategies to mitigate that conflict, and also some ways that we can provide feedback, and also ways that we can prepare ourselves to receive that feedback. Alright, one of the questions in the chat here quickly - I know folks have to run off to the student panel - in terms of dealing with professors or employers who give only negative feedback, I think one of the things, that's important to do is to prepare those questions, right? And to really focus those questions on solutions. So instead of asking a supervisor you know "what did you think of my manuscript?", you could say something like you know, how can I make this section clearer? Trying to get as specific as possible about what kind of feedback you're looking for and asking those questions and being prepared with those questions as you're walking into any kind of meeting is one of the ways that you can, you can deal with that negative feedback. Jason, do you have anything? Any suggestions that you might add to that one?

[Jason Dodd]

I'd just go back to your list, I think they're all very good things, right? Like if maybe we frame it, not necessarily negative feedback. But yeah, getting them to be as specific as possible. Changing the questions using some of those ones that Shannon listed, I think, would elicit maybe a little bit more negative and positive feedback. And have that understanding. Advisor, professor employer, right? That power dynamic makes it really hard for you to change them, so it does may affect changing your mindset going in, but if you can use those questions to elicit a different type of feedback. Or maybe their relationship is at a point where you can advocate for yourself and say, you know I appreciate all these wonderful things that I can work on, but it also really helps my confidence and enthusiasm, motivation, if I can hear some of the things that are also going well. and that may go a long way to helping them understand their approach and how it works with different people.

[Shannon Rushe]

Absolutely, and I think one of the things that you can do if you are in a place where you feel like you can work with your advisor, or let's say your lab or your Department is maybe ask for an opportunity for everyone around the room to share, you know their accomplishments and their challenges because I think that it's a lot easier for everyone if it's sort of being done as a group to share what your accomplishments are and what your challenges are. And even your advisor has accomplishments and challenges, right? And so having that be sort of more of a group or something that you're doing in a pair and both sharing also helps to build that relationship and that trust because it's not so one sided. So as Jason said, if you feel like you're in a place where you can advocate for that, or you can ask for that, is definitely something that we would recommend.

So we don't want to keep you any longer because we do know that the student panel is starting, so if you want to hop over to the Sessions tab and jump into that panel, you're welcome to do so. But that being said, Jason and I will stick around for another couple of minutes if you do have questions. But thank you so much for attending and apologies for the delayed start as a result of tech issues, but I think we were still able to capture everything that Jason and I wanted to talk about, and hopefully you were able to find some, some valuable ideas.

[Jason Dodd]

Thanks everyone, enjoy the rest of the afternoon.

[Shannon Rushe]

Thanks everybody.

[End of Transcript]