

C2: Developing and Maintaining a Positive and Productive Communication Environment in an Animal Care and Use Program

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Speaker Disclosure



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The speakers have no relevant personal/professional/financial relationship(s) with respect to this educational activity

Learning Objectives

- Identify the diversity that exists within their own animal care and use programs and share why diversity is important
- Review activities that can improve communication among stakeholders, including the IACUC, research teams, veterinary and husbandry staff, IACUC administration, and more
- Learn how to develop and maintain an environment that fosters positive and productive communication
- Explore situations that can compromise positive communication, and discuss ways to deal with difficult communication situations

Diversity

- What is Diversity?
- What is not Diversity?



Understanding yourself first

- Complete the statement below:
- 1. When I hear people speaking in another language, I think they are _____.
- 2. I really feel like an outsider when _____.
- 3. When Dr. ???? starts to ask a questions, I _____.
- 4. When the community member is quiet and does not contribute to the discussion, I _____.

Why is it important in our IACUC's?

- Productivity
- Perspective
- Acceptance/Diminishing discrimination
- Better work experience
- Range of talent



Communication Tone

- Language matters
 - “Post-Approval Monitor”
 - “PAM Audit”
 - “IACUC Semi-Annual Facility Inspection”
 - VS
 - “Scientific Liaison”
 - “Liaison Visit”
 - “IACUC Site Visit”
- What about:
- “Investigation”
 - “Compliance”
 - “Rules”
 - “Mandated” (especially with “Re-training”)



Communication Tone (cont'd)

- Subtle changes of language can make a big difference
 - Try replacing “**but**” with “**and**”

- Instead of starting with NO, start with empathy and understanding, then emphasize what you CAN do

Avoid “Doom and Gloom”

- UW: Scientific Liaisons build positive relationships with PIs/labs
 - When non-compliances are discovered, Liaisons work with PIs to fix the situation or to correct the protocol
 - PIs often contact their Liaisons about issues and ask for help before they spiral out of control



IACUC Interaction

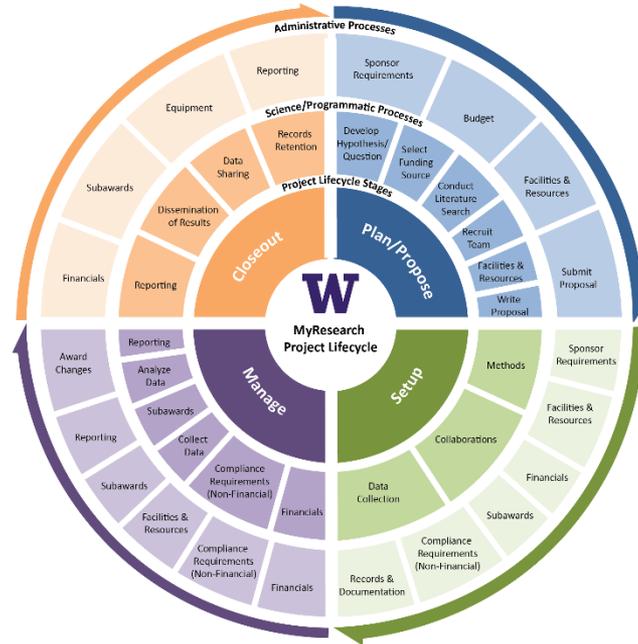
- **Lighten the tone of IACUC interactions, regardless of the medium**
 - Face-to-face
 - IACUC review process
 - General correspondence/announcements

Remember the Benefits

- “Risk awareness” is at the heart of what we do
 - Protocol review
 - Grant-protocol congruency
 - IACUC facility inspections
 - Communication with external regulators/accrediting bodies

Can be an obstacle to positive communication
- Practice “benefits awareness”
 - UW site visitors encouraged to ask researchers about their work
 - UW IACUC meetings begin with a “Benefits Story”
 - UW invites PIs to staff meetings to share their research
 - Especially powerful when it comes from PIs themselves

Be a partner



Strategies for Improving Communication

Practice Self Awareness

Am I listening?

What pushes my buttons?

*Am I blocking my own
understanding?*

Actively engage in better communication

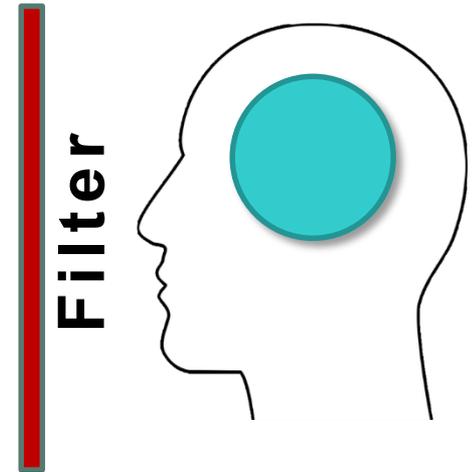
Ask clarifying questions.

Listen!

Mental Models and Mental Filters

Mental Model – The way we perceive the world and how it works.

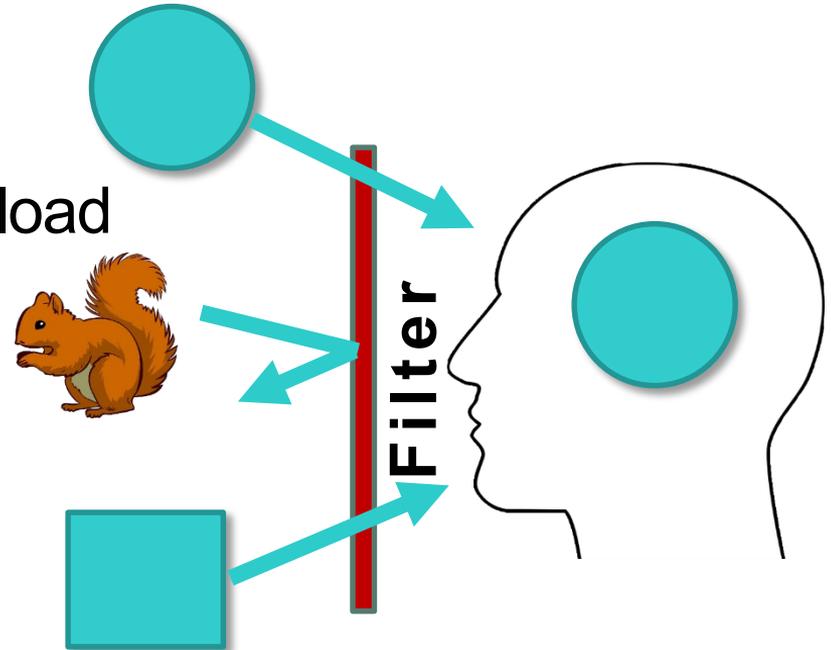
Mental Filter - A set of personal assumptions composed of education and years professional and cultural experience. The filter influences our mental model.



Listening Step 1: Recognize a Mental Filter

Clean Filter

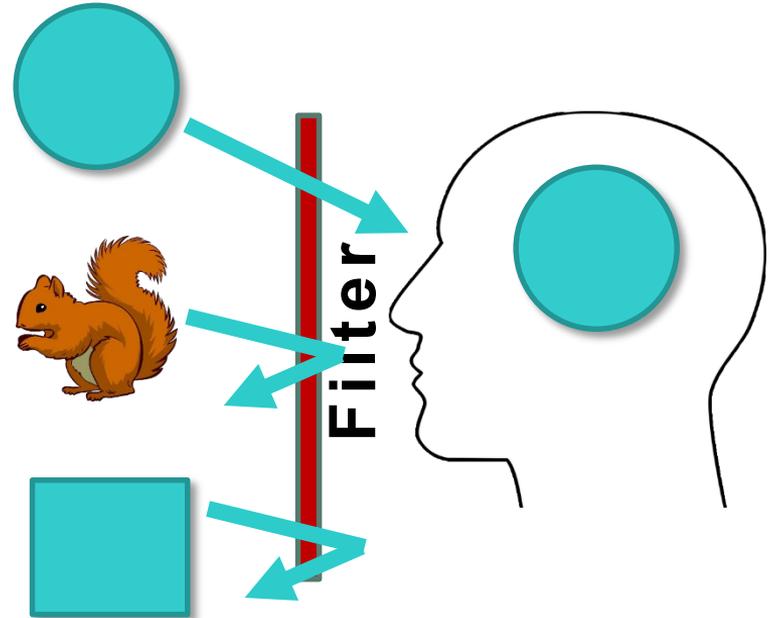
- Protects from information overload
- Allows focus
- Permits quicker evaluation
- Facilitates quicker learning



Listening Step 2: Recognize a Mental Filter

Clogged Filter

- Blocks innovative concepts
- Inhibits empathy
- Obscures understanding
- Prevents good listening



Listening Step 3: Recognize When Your Mental Filter is Clogged

Your filter may be clogged when you:

- Mentally or actually finish someone else's sentences
- Craft a counter-argument in your mind while the other person is talking
- Find your attention easily diverted or feel the urge to multitask
- Find yourself thinking you need to inform the speaker of your credentials or degree

Develop New Ways

Change

Develop New Ways



Let Go to Let Come

Choose to let go of outdated mental filters that no longer serve you.
Allow new models to emerge:

- What do you need to **let go**?
- What is calling you to **let come**?

“Every moment provides the opportunity for enlightenment.”



Scenario: Foreign Investigator

- Dr. X is an investigator from another country. He speaks with a thick accent therefore hard to understand. Communicates by E-mail mostly, rarely by phone.
- The IACUC received a complaint that several rats have been found dead post-op with some cannibalized by cage mates. The complaint says the investigator insists on performing surgeries after hours. The facility staff never knows when he is coming in.
- When notified of animal deaths he appears to not care.

Judger

- I always have trouble with foreign investigators. They never seem to listen.
- I do not think this investigator understands what we are saying.
- He does not respond when notified of deaths. He does not care.
- It is the Attending Vet's fault for not handling the situation

Learner path opens up discussion not closes it down

Learner

Questions for the facility

- What does the protocol say?
- Have there been problems before?
- What does the Attending Vet know?

Some questions to ask investigator:

- Why do you prefer to perform surgeries late at night?
- What survival rate are you expecting?
- Is notification of an animal's death helpful or do you
- require any more once an animal has died.

Results

Facility

- Protocol lists 5% mortality
- No other problems
- Vet does not get word until 3-4 days later

Investigator

- Perform surgery at night because more space available and no interruptions
- At least 2 to die/week
- By the time I see the message it is too late to get tissues.

Mental filter clogs that are hard to unclog alone...

When people are exposed to words and behaviors that reflect **biases** against their race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disabled status, etc., it does measurable harm:

- Declines in job satisfaction or motivation in school
- Declines in organizational commitment
- Declines in performance or productivity
- Increases in stress (including impacts on physical and mental health).

None of this helps communication!

Shared responsibility for communication environment

Those who are *not* directly targeted by biased words or behavior may be well positioned to help the people who are and to discourage such expressions of bias going forward.

- Disrupt the behavior
- Call on others to help
- Address the problematic behavior
- Support the targets

Good resource: [The Unconscious Bias Project \(unconsciousbiasproject.org\)](http://unconsciousbiasproject.org)

What should a bystander say?

There's no one right thing to say. Here are some options:

“I”-statements. “I feel uncomfortable with what you just said because...”

Label the problem. “What you said rests on a stereotype...”

Make the offender reflect. “When you said that just now, what did you mean?”

Support targeted people. “I heard what they said to you. I am so sorry.”

Communication Scenarios

Bob Burns, a man of about 30 with a Ph.D. from an elite research university, is a new professor in the Biology Department. As he tries to get his research lab established, he has submitted a large number of protocols to the IACUC. All of his submissions that have been approved so far have required major revisions; about half of the protocols he has submitted still await the IACUC's approval.

This week Bob's patience has run out. In a meeting with his department chair, he vents his anger about the "obstructionist" IACUC. Even through the closed office door, people in the corridor can hear him yell about "those difficult women" on the committee who "just don't understand cutting-edge research." As it happens, the IACUC's membership is currently five women and two men.

The Chair of the Biology Department turns up at the office of the IACUC Coordinator (also a woman) and conveys Bob's complaint. She tries to explain the main issues the IACUC has had with Bob's protocols (including overly technical narratives copied and pasted from his grant applications, plus an apparent lack of understanding of how much space and support staff the animal care program can provide for the animals Bob wants), but the chair cuts her off. "Fix this," he says.

Communication Scenarios

At a weekly meeting, the supervisor of the animal care staff discusses upcoming teaching laboratory activities for which the animal care staff will be providing support. The supervisor reminds the staff that these activities present special challenges “because you’re not just handling the animals, you’re also handling the students.” When describing a blood draw the groups of students will need to perform with rats, the supervisor comments, “Be on the lookout for students getting queasy. Those South Asian girls drop like flies in this lab.”

One of the newer members of the animal care staff, a young woman of Bangladeshi descent, shifts uncomfortably in her seat but is silent.

Communication Scenarios

The IACUC's field scientist member is retiring after many years, and the IACUC Chair is eager to line up a replacement for him. He reaches out to Carl Cleveland, an assistant professor in the Environmental Studies Department, a young ecologist who has three active protocols for field studies of waterfowl. Since Carl's submissions to the IACUC have been models of clarity, the Chair believes he would be a good addition to the committee. As a bonus, Carl would be the first IACUC member from the Environmental Studies Department in about a decade.

When the IACUC Chair visits Carl's office to extend the invitation, however, Carl's response is somewhat curt. "I'm trying to stay on top of my research and grant-writing so I can get tenured, and I just can't take on more," he says. "Frankly, I'm pretty burned out from being the token black member of so many committees at this university." Despite a very diverse student population at the university, IACUC's current membership is entirely white.

Questions?



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