Additional Handout: Case Study Problem-Solving Exercise

1. **Task Conflict – Public Works Project Disagreement**

Scenario: The Road Maintenance Supervisor and the Environmental Compliance Officer disagree on how to proceed with a rural road repair project.
- The supervisor wants to use gravel from a nearby quarry to save costs.
- The compliance officer insists on sourcing from a certified vendor to meet environmental regulations.

Conflict Type: Task Conflict

Objective: Practice collaborative problem-solving and policy-based negotiation.

Steps:
1. Acknowledge the conflict: The department head facilitates a meeting.
2. Clarify priorities: Cost-efficiency vs. regulatory compliance.
3. Explore alternatives: Can the local quarry be certified? Is there a compromise vendor?
4. Agree with a solution: Choose a vendor that meets both cost and compliance needs.

Learning Outcome: Even in resource-constrained environments, task conflicts can be resolved through shared goals and creative compromise.

2. **Relationship Conflict – Tension Between Administrative Staff**

Scenario: Two long-time employees in the County Clerk's Office, Linda and Sharon, have developed a strained relationship.
- Linda feels Sharon is dismissive and controlling.
- Sharon believes Linda is resistant to change and undermines her authority.
  Their tension is affecting office morale and public service delivery.

Conflict Type: Relationship Conflict

Objective: Practice empathy, mediation, and emotional intelligence.

Steps:
1. Private conversations: The supervisor meets with each employee to understand their concerns.
2. Facilitated dialogue: A neutral HR representative helps them express their perspectives.
3. Identify root causes: Miscommunication, generational differences, and unclear role boundaries.
4. Set expectations: Define respectful communication norms and clarify responsibilities.

Learning Outcome: Relationship conflicts in small, close-knit teams require sensitivity, neutrality, and a focus on rebuilding trust.

3. **Process Conflict in Client Intake Procedures**

Department: Rural County Human Services – Family Assistance Division

Scenario: Two supervisors, Karen (Intake Supervisor) and Derek (Case Management Supervisor), disagree on how new client applications should be processed.
- Karen wants the intake workers to complete all documentation and eligibility verification before passing the case over to case managers.
- Derek argues that this delays service delivery and wants case managers to begin assessments as soon as basic information is collected.

This disagreement has led to:
- Inconsistent workflows
- Frustrated staff
- Delayed services for clients in urgent need

Conflict Type: Process Conflict
Root Cause: Different views on efficiency vs. thoroughness in client intake procedures.
Conflict Management Strategy
1. Facilitated Meeting: The department director brings both supervisors together to:
   - Clarify goals (timely service vs. accurate documentation)
   - Identify pain points in the current process
2. Data Review: They analyze:
   - Average intake processing times
   - Client satisfaction and service delays
   - Error rates in documentation
3. Collaborative Redesign: A hybrid process is developed:
   - Intake completes essential eligibility checks
   - Case managers begin preliminary assessments in parallel
   - Full documentation is finalized collaboratively
4. Pilot Program: The new process is tested in one district for 30 days, with feedback loops built in.
Outcome
- Improved coordination between teams
- Faster service delivery without sacrificing accuracy
- Higher staff morale due to clearer roles and reduced friction

4. **Low Morale in the Public Health Outreach Team**

Background: The Public Health Outreach team has been working long hours due to a recent uptick in community health needs. Staff are exhibiting signs of burnout, including missed deadlines, low energy, and increased absenteeism.
Problem: Despite their efforts, employees feel their work is unrecognized and that leadership is unaware of their challenges.
Supervisor's Role:
- Identify the root cause: Conduct informal check-ins or a short anonymous survey to understand staff concerns.
- Implement solutions:
- Introduce a "Team Spotlight" in staff meetings to recognize contributions.
- Offer flexible scheduling or comp time to support work-life balance.
- Advocate for temporary support staff or interns to reduce workload.
Outcome Goal: Boost morale by showing appreciation, improving work conditions, and involving staff in problem-solving.