Nova Southeastern University
Broward County, FL

Understanding Conflict Management Systems and Strategies in the Workplace: A Pilot Study

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+ Today’s Agenda

- Introductions
- Overview & Purpose
- The Study
- Goals and Methodology
- Results
- Implications for Future Research
- Q & A
Our Team

- **Principal Investigator** - Neil H. Katz, Ph.D. Chair, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
- **Co-Principal Investigator** - Linda Flynn, Ph.D. (ABD)
- **Student Researchers** - Hugh Beswick and Patty Heath, MA
Our Team

United Way of Broward County

greater fort lauderdale alliance broward county
Study Overview & Purpose
Background

- Funding Source – Quality of Life Grant
- Our School and Our Community
The Study

The research study measures workplace leaders’ and employees awareness, perception and usage of conflict management systems and strategies in Broward County.

- Kinds of conflicts experienced within organization
- Techniques utilized to manage conflicts
- Effects of conflicts
- Perception of associated costs to conflict
- Conflict management training
- Level of satisfaction with organizational conflict management systems and approaches
Purpose

- Current research covers narrow scope:
  - Cost of conflict
  - Time spent on conflict
  - Turnover rates

- Studies of more holistic nature are scarce:
  - Systems-thinking
  - Best practices
  - Relationship to broader organizational culture
  - Relationship between organization and client/customer, employee, and community

- Overall value to Social Sciences and Management Science
Assumptions

- Claims of popularity of conflict management systems are overrated
- Little or no awareness of what IS an effective conflict management system
- Little or no awareness of relevant tools, training, and resources in the community
- Conflict may be more prevalent in organizations today, due to economic climate
- Leaders have a different view of conflict than their employees
GOALS & METHODOLOGY
Our initial goals of the study included:

Because it was a community partnership.....

Form a more cohesive relationship between...
Methodology

- Mixed Method Design
  - Qualitative
    - Interviews with leaders in 20 organizations – public, private and non-profit sectors
  - Quantitative
    - Employee Surveys
    - Managerial Surveys
Leader and Manager Interviews

- Current State
- Usage of techniques
- Overall effects
- Training
- Awareness
- Satisfaction
- Perception
Organizational Survey

Demographics
Experience
Effectiveness
Satisfaction
Perception
Results
What is Conflict?

Depends on who you are asking...

‘Conflict is a crisis’

‘A dispute between two people’

‘It is management – what we do everyday, all day’

‘A dispute or argument is minor, a conflict is something more substantial’

‘Conflict is a bad word! We avoid talking about it…’
Themes, Patterns, and Stories

- Old-fashioned systems rule!
  - Cause more conflict than solve
  - Fear-based
  - Litigation-focused
  - Lack of awareness of tools and training available

- It is all about leadership and culture!
  - Engagement vs. avoidance
  - Leadership style
  - Organizational culture
  - Mission and Vision
Themes, Patterns and Stories

- Awareness Happens!
  - Prevalence of conflict
  - Espoused Theory vs. Theory in Use
    - Most leaders gave high marks to themselves
    - Mixed results
    - The myth of the “right person”
  - Disputes depend on the workplace!
    - Generational
    - Multi-cultural
    - Communication gaps
    - Formal processes
    - Interpersonal
Proven Practices
observing what seems to work....

- Preventative conflict management
  - ‘Clear expectations’
  - ‘Teach communication’
  - Monitor the environment
  - Emotional intelligence

- Training
  - ‘Training, training and more training’
  - Link to conflict management
Proven Practices
observing what seems to work….

Leadership

- ‘Ability to use multi-frames’
- ‘One is not given power, one has to negotiate power’
- ‘I always give something before I ask for something’
- ‘First seek to understand’
- The best question to consistently ask is “Why?”
Proven Practices
observing what may not work

- Formal Grievance Processes / No Process [without the other stuff]
- Avoidance is a preferred method

- “Very specific instructions – not natural”
- “Human Resources is a barrier to doing business”
- The best question to consistently ask is “Why?”
- “Time consuming”
- “Cumbersome and takes way too long – conflict escalates”
Preliminary analysis: Key takeaways

- Multiple definitions of conflict
- View parts instead of the whole
- Key role for leadership and culture
- Tendency to hire outside resources
- Isolated examples of best practices need to promoted
- Holistic view of organizations provide more insight
- ACR Field would benefit from increase in awareness and more credibility
Thank you!

Q & A