

Participant Materials

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**Organizational Conflict Management:  
The Emergence of Mediators and Conflict Resolution Consultants in Organizations**

Harold Coleman, Esq.

Senior Vice President, Mediation.org

American Arbitration Association

Rebecca Storrow, Ph.D.

Commercial Vice President

American Arbitration Association

Michael Powell

Commercial Vice President

American Arbitration Association

One of the challenges an organizational conflict consultant or change manager may encounter as they enter an organization is a lack of trust that can impede effective communication. Unresolved conflicts may be hindering organizational productivity, but oftentimes personality conflicts or challenges to personal identity can get in the way of your attempts to improve organizational functioning. When the organization falls short of its own expectations, there can be blame or denial, or a sense that this is just the way things are around here. It can result in employees who do not perform up to their potential, which is frustrating for leadership, but also to the employees themselves. No one wants to feel that they are not doing a good or worthy job. Many of these negative occurrences become patterns from which organizations have a great deal of trouble breaking out. Mediators are well equipped to explore some of the theories that speak to these cycles of behavior. Because of the skills used in mediation, you may encounter familiar processes in understanding these roadblocks and helping groups work through them in a way that is effective in their organizational culture.

As an organizational conflict management analyst, you must understand and gently communicate what is really going on in teams and departments. You are expected to intervene in all the right places, in just the right ways, and at appropriate times to help them resolve obstacles to growth, evolution and success. Working collaboratively, a good organizational conflict consultant can reasonably quickly assess the situation, and identify positive opportunities for intervention, change, and prevention. Based on the organization's goals and objectives, the consultant partners with stakeholders to devise and implement a conflict management plan that meets the organization's needs, manages conflict through appropriate intervention, and builds team competencies.

### **Organizational Conflict Management includes:**

- A sensitivity and respect for the organization's people, history, culture, and accomplishments
- Building the organization's conflict management competency, resulting in greater innovation and problem solving
- Clear, productive, and results-oriented communication
- Measurable achievements for goal setting aligned with organizational direction and strategy
- Increased collaboration and a clear team direction
- Increased ability of the leadership to do strategic decision making and leadership
- Organizational alignment and measured accountability to the intended vision, mission, goals and strategies.

### **Some tools of the Organizational Conflict Consultant include:**

#### **Facilitation**

Facilitating meetings, small and large, that allow leaders to participate (rather than facilitate)

- Designing and facilitating meetings and retreats for: leaders, strategic planning, team building
- Serves as an impartial, third party facilitator to resolve conflicts between two or more people

#### **Coaching and training for teams, departments and individuals, instructing how to**

- Have challenging conversations
- Resolve conflicts
- Collaborate for optimal results
- Give and receive feedback honestly, but empathically
- Build strong effective teams
- Manage conflict for productivity and innovation
- Think and plan strategically
- Multiple intelligence and diversity
- Training and educating about mediation, arbitration, facilitation, conciliation, and many other ADR processes

#### **Assessment tools**

- Quantitative assessment of market trends, organizational output, growth or decline in productivity, cost and revenue, etc.

- Qualitative assessment of language, symbols, systems, processes, attitudes and opinions, etc.
- Facilitating group feedback, assessment, and team building sessions
- Introducing new ways to use assessment information within an organization
- Leadership Learning Community (May 2001)

*Downloaded from the Leadership Learning Community (May 2001)*

<http://leadershiplearning.org/leadership-resources/resources-and-publications>

### ***General Websites***

- **International Society of Organizational Development and Change** - <http://www.isodc.org/>
- **Society of Emotional Intelligence** - <http://www.societyofei.org/index.html>
- The **Independent Sector** provides tools that nonprofit organizations can use to measure their social and economic contributions. Links are provided to resources that are conducting research and developing measures to capture nonprofit impact; organizations focused on measuring impact; and measurement tools and publications. <http://www.indepsec.org/pathfinder/impact/index.html>
- **Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)** is an affinity group of the Council on Foundations that is dedicated to promoting learning and encouraging dialogue among funders committed to the field of organizational effectiveness. Their website has links to organizations that study or promote organizational effectiveness, an extensive list of readings, publications and papers. <http://www.geofunders.org/main/resources.htm>

### ***On-Line Assessment Tools***

- **The Social Capital Assessment tool** provides an *organizational profile* that is designed to assist organizations to delineate the relationships and networks that exist among formal and informal institutions in communities. It also provides tools for assessing the organization's internal characteristics that may promote or hinder the building of social capital in a given community. A common definition of social capital is "the features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. <http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/external/lac/lac.nsf/51105678feaadaea852567d6006c1de4/d2d929b5fff4b555852567ee000414ad?OpenDocument>
- The **Nonprofit Assessment Tool** is available on-line from the Management Center. It is a free 8 part, 80-item questionnaire that enables organizations to measure their capacity and performance in areas such as administration and leadership, community relations and marketing, and planning among others. <http://www.tmcenter.org/assessment/toolintro.html>
- The **Drucker Foundation Self-Assessment Tool** is an organizational self-assessment guide that helps organizations address five questions: What is our mission? Who is our

customer? What does the customer value? What are our results? What is our plan?  
<http://www.druckerfoundation.org/leaderbooks/sat/process.html>

- Other organizational assessment tools are available from Carter McNamara's Free Management Library under the *Organizational Performance Management* section  
[http://www.mapnp.org/library/org\\_perf/org\\_perf.htm#anchor984160](http://www.mapnp.org/library/org_perf/org_perf.htm#anchor984160)

### **Qualitative interviewing**

- Interviewing employees to collect richer feedback on organizational or team functioning
- Interviewing key employees to determine a current baseline for organizational functioning

### **360 degree feedback processes**

- Designing customized 360 degree feedback processes for teams and organizations. Not only does the manager give feedback to their staff, but staff is able to provide honest, constructive feedback to leadership and management about their needs and ideas for improvement
- Process implementation and execution including measurable accountability
- Coaching on strengths and areas for development identified in 360 feedback process
- Leaving organization with a culture that supports 360 feedback

### **Benefits of having an Organizational Conflict Management System include:**

- Reduced time and money in resolving conflicts upstream
- Solve problems more productively and amicably
- Encourages open communication and cooperation
- Better service delivery and decrease in customer complaints
- Gain staff loyalty to the organization
- Strengthens relationships
- Increased morale and motivation
- Decreased attrition, absenteeism, and lateness
- Look at old problems from new perspectives
- Decreases error rates and increases productivity

### **SKILLS NEEDED AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT CONSULTANT / TRAINER**

#### **Knowledge**

- Understand the laws and regulations that have an impact on conflict management and on organizational functioning in areas related to conflict management.
- Understand the organizational change process.

- Understand the design and practice of training in the workplace, including adult learning theory.
- Understand conflict resolution theory, principles and methods, particularly as they apply to the various conflict resolution mechanisms typically part of conflict management systems.
- Be aware of current best practices in conflict management.

### **Abilities**

- Ability to manage organizational change.
- Ability to conduct needs assessment (i.e. to discern the nature of the organizational needs).
- Ability to design and conduct adult training.
- Ability to design and conduct evaluation of program implementation.
- Ability to facilitate groups and build consensus.
- Ability to design a conflict management system (or to lead the design process).
- Ability to work collaboratively.
- Ability to assess the decision-making centers in an organization and to gain the support and cooperation of the key decision makers.
- Ability to mediate, or to use a mediative process within groups.
- Ability to design and implement communication strategies within organizations.
- Ability to understand the culture of an organization and to work appropriately in the context of that culture.
- Ability to identify and incorporate reinforcement mechanisms into the change process.
- Ability to relate to and identify diverse groups of persons -- in the broadest sense of diversity. This includes race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, upbringing, class, occupation, etc. etc.
- Ability to identify interest-based, rights-based and power-based processes which are in place at the time of the system design, and to integrate these into a conflict management system in an appropriate manner.

### **Some Widely Accepted Values and Beliefs Regarding Organizational Conflict Consulting**

- Conflict is inevitable and usually can be resolved constructively.
- The use of a participative process for system design, where possible, is superior in its effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction for the parties involved.
- Interest-based processes and rights-based processes need to be included in conflict management systems.
- Interpersonal relationships are important in the workplace.
- Leaders need to model the practices they want others to carry out.

- The process of organizational change may present challenges and risks, but it can also provide a unique opportunity for building collaborative strength and a healthier, more participatory work environment.

### **Commentary on the Knowledge**

#### **1. Understand the laws and regulations that have an impact on conflict management and on organizational functioning in areas related to conflict management.**

The relevant laws and regulations will depend on the jurisdiction (city, county, state, province, country, etc.) in which an organization functions, and on the persons who will use the system. Possible users include: employees and internal groups, clients or customers, vendors and/or competitors. Conflict management systems must be consistent with controlling legal frameworks

#### **2. Understand the organizational change process.**

The field of Organization Development focuses on the theory and practice of managing organizational change. The process includes contracting, needs assessment, the actual change process, and monitoring and evaluation which in turn lead to further change, sometimes generating conflict.

#### **3. Understand the design and practice of training in the workplace, including adult learning theory.**

An essential component of managing conflict is the effective use of training. Training adults in the workplace involves expertise about how to assess needs, design and deliver training, and evaluate effectiveness. Poor training, without context and practice, can sabotage efforts by providing leadership the assumption that staff has been given skills to manage conflict, that in reality have not been couched in day to day implementation.

#### **4. Understand conflict resolution theory, principles and methods, particularly as they apply to the various possible conflict resolution mechanisms which are typically part of conflict management systems.**

Over the past few decades a growing amount of theory about conflict has been developed. Designers must understand this theory and keep up with new developments.

#### **5. Be aware of current conflict management best practices.**

Along with theory about conflict resolution, we expect conflict management system designers to keep up with the latest developments in systems design, i.e. with what is, and is not, working.

### **Commentary on Abilities**

#### **1. Ability to manage organizational change.**

Organizational change may be required to establish a Conflict Management System. Change itself is a difficult process to manage and frequently generates additional conflict. People and organizations tend to resist change. Understanding the culture of an organization, gaining the support and encouragement of organizational leaders, gaining the knowledge and participation of the majority of members of the organization, helping to identify the possible obstacles to change, ensuring that training is available to the organization, and creating systems to monitor and evaluate the change process are all aspects of managing organizational change. While we expect that the task is usually best performed by a team, the awareness of the components is absolutely essential for anyone in the position of managing organizational conflict.

## **2. Ability to conduct a conflict needs assessment.**

Needs assessment, i.e. the process of accurately determining the nature of the problem an organization is having and describing its existing conflict processes, is an essential first step in organizational change. This leads to discerning what skills people need to be trained to do, and what other changes are necessary to manage conflict and achieve the goals of the change effort. Part of a conflict needs assessment is diagnosis of cost of conflict, cost of interventions, formal and informal structures within the organization, significant relationships among persons and groups, reward systems in place, and the conflict management style(s) of the leaders

## **3. Ability to design and conduct adult training.**

Implementation of a Conflict Management System frequently calls for participants to learn new concepts or skills. Training adults involves its own skills set. Training may incorporate the concepts of adult learning theory. Also training should routinely be assessed to determine what is working well, and what needs improving.

## **4. Ability to design and conduct evaluation of program implementation.**

Well designed Conflict Management Systems incorporate processes to monitor and adjust them as needed. This is best practice. When monitoring and evaluation are built into a system from the beginning, the system works better because it picks up problems that can be corrected or processes that can be improved.

## **5. Ability to facilitate groups and build consensus.**

Good facilitation and consensus building skills are critical for including stakeholders as partners in the design process as well as ways for a designer to model interest-based processes. Such modeling is particularly important for participants who doubt the value of interest-based processes. These participants often need to experience the effectiveness of these processes during the design of a Conflict Management System in order to accept and become advocates for that system once it is implemented.

## **6. Ability to design a conflict management system (or to lead the design process).**

A design process which is highly participative, allowing participants to share in contributions and decisions, may have the best chance of being integrated into an organization. Designers should therefore use such processes whenever possible and should involve the organization and various stakeholders in the design process to the greatest possible extent.

**7. Ability to work collaboratively.**

The way one works teaches as much as anything else one does. Because creating conflict management systems has the potential to challenge some deep beliefs about conflict and appropriate conflict behavior, the designers must "walk the talk". The teaching about the new system begins when the designers start the conflict needs assessment process, not when the formal training begins.

**8. Ability to assess the primary decision-making centers in an organization and to gain the support and cooperation of key decision-makers.**

Two critical elements of successful design work are: grass roots participation and strong leadership support. Thus the designer needs to be able to ensure that key decision-makers are supportive and actively cooperating when needed.

**9. Ability to mediate, or to use a mediative process within groups.**

Many persons in our cultures have been taught that the most effective and appropriate decision-making processes are rights-based, in which leaders make all major decisions because of the belief that their managerial or legal expertise will enable them to make the best decisions. As described above, however, experience and research suggest that organizational change frequently is more successful if conducted in an interest-based manner. Designers should be experienced in managing an interest-based process including mediation processes and to overcome the belief that rights-based decisions are the best and most effective way to design a system.

**10. Ability to design and implement communication strategies within organizations.**

Open communication is essential to interest-based processes. The designer must be aware of the communication needs and of ways to get those needs met. This is especially so in organizations in which employees or managers do not have high levels of trust.

**11. Ability to understand the culture of an organization.**

Each organizational culture is different, and the differences may result in differently designed conflict management systems. Systems that conflict with organizational culture generally will not be accepted and well-used in the long run. The designer needs to be able to understand the culture of an organization and then work within the boundaries of that culture.

**12. Ability to identify and incorporate reinforcement mechanisms into the change process.**



Designing a Conflict Management System is only part of the work. Getting people to use the system is another major task. Helping to identify and incorporate appropriate reward systems to reinforce new behaviors in conflict can be extremely important. Integrating skills and expectations about managing conflict can be included in the performance appraisal system.

**13. Ability to relate to and identify diverse groups of persons -- in the broadest sense of diversity. This includes race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, upbringing, class, occupation, etc. etc.**

Since organizations are becoming increasingly diverse, the ability to interact effectively and respectfully with persons from diverse backgrounds is essential. Further, the sensitivity to diversity is necessary to create conflict management systems which will be able to be safely used by all persons.

**14. Ability to identify interest-based, rights-based and power-based processes which are in place at the time of the system design, and to integrate these into a conflict management system in an appropriate manner.**

Since systems design work takes place either in an organization which has a history or processes (typically power-based and rights-based, and sometimes interest-based), one must identify the formal and informal practices that have been in place and integrate these into the new system in an appropriate manner. This implies that there are appropriate uses of each process, which we affirm.

### **Commentary on Values and Beliefs**

**1. Conflict is inevitable and can be resolved constructively.**

Conflict itself is a neutral event - it is neither good nor bad. Many people claim to agree with this proposition, but when conflict becomes difficult a belief emerges that conflict somehow is wrong and someone ought to be blamed or punished. Often this attitude is coupled with a deep belief that "real conflict" must conclude with "a winner and a loser". Changing the "win/lose-conflict will lead to blaming" mindset is part of the difficult work in conflict management system design.

A corollary of the belief that conflict is inevitable: Conflict management systems are vibrant and dynamic processes which are ever changing and ever adaptive. This belief is illustrated in the cyclic nature of the process, with monitoring and evaluation leading to new needs assessment, etc.

**2. The use of a participative process for system design, where possible, is superior in its effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction for the parties involved.**

If one is to assist an organization to design a conflict management system, the designer must be able to "walk the talk" of interest-based processes. A designer who presents her or himself as

"the expert who will dispense the solution to an organization's conflict problems" will not be able to model a process which will engage members in the major organizational change which a conflict management system involves. In addition, when one is working with people who do not believe in the value of interest-based processes, one has to be able to respond to the resistance with knowledge, sensitivity, and experience. For example, conflict management systems have been designed well on paper, but the process left out some key decision-makers in the organization. Because of the failure to include these personnel, the resulting systems were not well used.

All of this is not to say that an interest-based process is always possible. Designers must be able to work in a participatory manner when it is appropriate to do so.

### **3. Interest-based processes and rights-based processes need to be included in conflict management systems.**

A well-designed conflict management system will have both interest-based and rights-options. Individuals with conflicts should be able to choose the methods of conflict resolution they believe will be most effective. We affirm that there are times when rights-based methods for resolving conflict will be the best method. However, conflict management systems in which interest-based options are not present are too limiting to be considered best practice.

### **4. Interpersonal relationships are important in the workplace.**

Organizations are relying increasingly on teams and the exchange of information to function. From the organizational point of view, interpersonal relationships which are healthy and open will increase productivity. When interpersonal relationships are not fostered in an organization more and more employees are finding other employment, resorting to litigation and/or not working to their full capacity. Conflict management systems should be designed, to the extent possible, to encourage the development and maintenance of healthy and openly communicative interpersonal relationships.

### **5. Leaders need to model the practices they want others to carry out.**

In the end, the goal of a conflict management system, especially one which emphasizes prevention and early resolution of conflicts, involves getting people to behave differently. Changing conflict behavior will be threatening for a large number of people. Thus part of the task of getting a conflict management system to work is getting people to take risks by responding differently in conflict. It is far less likely that people will take such risks if leaders are not modeling the kinds of behavior they are asking employees to practice.

### **6. The process of organizational change may present challenges and risks, but it can also provide a unique opportunity for building collaborative strength and a healthier, more participatory work environment.**

Organizational change is difficult. Organizations resist and try to maintain their original condition. Today's work climate calls for more collaboration and more employee empowerment. Organizations that can rise to the challenge of change can be stronger and more productive, retaining employees for longer periods of time and avoiding the strains of unmanaged conflict and the unnecessary costs of litigation.

## Education, Tools, and Training for Conflict Management

Training and education are the most frequently used approaches to managing conflict. This often requires a “needs based” approach to the training model, beginning with a training needs assessment. At the center of this classic model below is the process of identifying the needs of the organization, and especially the specific trainees that will be present in the session. How do you know what trainees need? You ask them – or at least that is one way to assess their needs. There are several specific strategies for conducting needs assessments – surveys, questionnaires, or interviews and a host of other methods. Analyzing the trainees is the most essential part of the process of training.

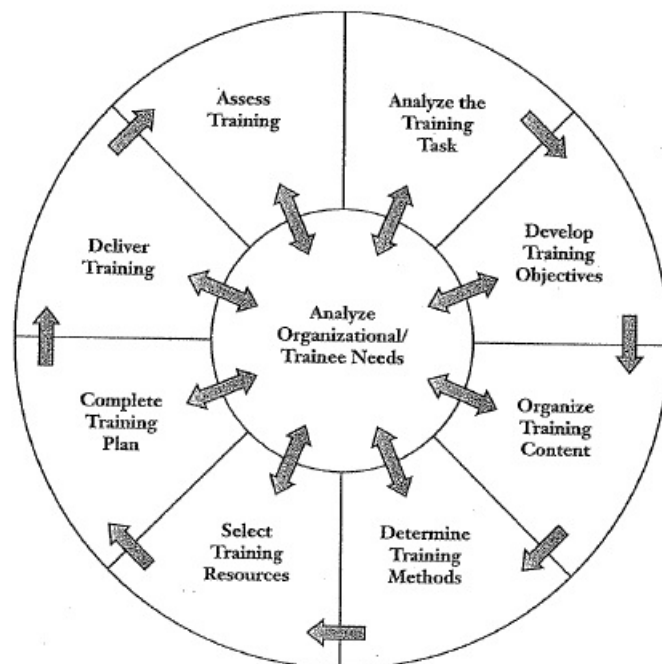


FIGURE 1.3 The Needs-Centered Training Model Focusing on trainee needs drives every step of designing and delivering a training presentation.

(Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004)

Delivery Model is the second important consideration. Adult learning theory provides the basis for understanding the way adults learn and the factors influencing the learning process. The basic assumption of adult learning theory is that adults engage in learning for personal reasons and that learning adds value to their life in some way. Malcolm Knowles' use of the term *andragogy*, meaning to teach adults, was the genesis for contemporary research in adult

learning. Adult learning in the workplace is far different from children learning in a classroom and therefore, requires a more in depth understanding of both adult learning motivators and the learning process in the context of organizations.

The premise of Knowles' learning theory centered originally on four principles or assumptions and later expanded to six. The learning assumptions include the concepts of self, experience, readiness, and orientation. The concept of *self* defines the adult by roles or identities taken on throughout life. Experience defines one's history, which forms the foundation for self, and accumulates over time. Readiness derives from the need to acquire new knowledge based on changes in or the variety of adult roles one must assume. Orientation centers on performance and problem solving with immediate application to real life situations.

In 1984 Knowles expanded the theory with two additional assumptions regarding reason and motivation. Adults engage in learning when they can define the reason for learning and motivation drives adults to learn. The added assumptions are the basis for subsequent research surrounding the notion of individual contextual factors such as learning motivations and goal orientation. In the years that followed Knowles' adult learning assumptions, numerous researchers expanded on and challenged the assumptions regarding adult learning.

Contemporary adult learning research in the context of workplace conflict puts the learner center stage and recognizes people as the primary agent for change and organizational performance outcomes. The adult experience creates the backdrop for learning and the learning process becomes one of inquiry rather than a set of known truths. Workplace learning must involve learning from experience and engagement in a group form of learning. Sharing knowledge and solving complex problems regarding conflict requires personal interaction and application of new conflict management strategies.

So what does all this theory and research mean for organizations investing in training and development to address conflict?

We know that changes in the modern workplace pose challenges for all workers. The complex and challenging global economy creates the need for continuous learning and updating of competencies and skills that enhance communication and conflict resolution. There is increased need for organizations to establish an environment of continuous collaborative professional growth and for the individual to assume a larger role in their own resolution of conflict becomes paramount to leveraging a competitive advantage. Therefore, there appears to be a need for organizations to expand from traditional approaches if skill based learning such as formal, classroom, and off the job, to approaches that include dispute resolution training through technology, communities of learning, and continuous on-the-job learning challenges. Organizations must also create a workplace environment that offers and encourages engagement in the use of alternative dispute resolution on a continuous and long-term basis.

## Composite Organization for Group Exercise



**IGS**  
Innova Growth Systems, Inc.

*“Growing businesses today for a sustainable tomorrow”*

### **Description:**

Innova Growth Systems, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation that provides consulting services to small business owners, particularly in the areas of sustainability, technology, and accounting. They receive fees for consulting and some federal grants for managing a network partnering small businesses in the United States and South America.

Innova has a staff of 114, including 14 administrators, 12 technology consultants, 13 financial consultants, and 15 business consultants. Teams are formed to assist small businesses, from start-up to expansion projects.

### **Mission Statement:**

Our mission is to provide consulting and networking to small businesses through sustainability, customized technology solutions, and smart financial management.

### **The Conflict:**

Since Innova was formed in 2004, it has increasingly worked with small start-up companies in Chile, Brazil, and Columbia. In a recent consulting project, it became clear that communication had broken down between staff in all four divisions of Innova. A lead facilitator for a large project has been blamed for causing the team to miss several deadlines in a consulting contract, resulting in a lawsuit by a Brazilian hemp swimwear manufacturer against Innova.

The young technology consultants complain that they are being asked to design systems that cannot be easily taught to users or maintained. Business / Marketing consultants complain that “those kids in tech” are not responsive enough to the demands of businesses in growing foreign markets, causing delays such as the one that brought on the recent lawsuit. Financial consultants complain that the company is over extended with too many complicated projects producing slim profit margins. And all agree that administrators are, out of frustration, “barking orders” at those who are “in the field, doing the real work.” Finally, Innova’s board of directors has demanded that there be better accountability since projects have been going over budget and they are furious about the lawsuit brought due to missed deadlines.

### **Conflict Management System Proposal**



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