Workplace Conflict Resolution

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Conflicts are inevitable in the business world. They can arise between individuals, such as manager and sub-ordinate as well as between groups, such as different departments. Organizational leaders are responsible for creating a work environment that enables employees to thrive. Effectively preventing and/or managing workplace conflict is an integral part of that role and should be considered not only the job of the company's Human Resource Manager, but leaders at every level should be ready to handle such conflict if it arises.

To aide in creating an environment which seeks to prevent conflict, an organization, should continuously evaluate its policies and procedures for handling complaints and disputes. Ensuring documents such as the employee handbook and its disciplinary procedure are informative and unbiased, respectively. Evaluating employee morale is another strategic tool which can be employed by an organization in the prevention and/or management of workplace conflict. Through assessing the areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of employees, an organization can make the requisite changes to facilitate a more harmonious working environment, where the need arises. Indications of employee morale can include: levels of absenteeism, injury statistics and employee turnover. In organizations where these statistics are kept, leaders and employees alike should familiarize themselves with them, not solely for conflict prevention and resolution purposes but for general knowledge. If there is a supportive strategic platform, it can be helpful to the everyday mediators; supervisors, managers and/or leaders at any level.

Disagreements and differences in opinions can escalate to interpersonal conflict if leaders do not intervene immediately. "Letting things blow over" is not an

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option, however, leaders must ensure that their prevention measures as well as mediation skills are appropriate for each situation, as interventions of this nature are crucial to the maintenance of a positive organizational culture. In choosing leaders, an organization should seek to assess their mediation skills and if such is identified as a weak area, appropriate training should be provided.

There are specific actions a leader at any level should avoid in conflict resolution:

- **Do not avoid the conflict, hoping it will go away**. Conflicts simmer but when unresolved will eventually re-surface when stress increases. Unresolved conflict lends to a tense working environment and usually resurfaces at the worst time. By not immediately addressing or mediating workplace conflict, you enable it! Intervene and mediate, remembering that it is your responsibility to aide in maintaining a harmonious work environment.

- **Do not meet separately with people in conflict.** All involved parties should be met with at the same time, giving each person an opportunity to convey his/her grievance. Keep in mind that as mediator you should be as unbiased as possible. Allowing any party to offer his/her version of events without the other party present sets the tone for employees to perceive you as biased. As conflict resolution is an ongoing process you should aim to remain as fair as possible in all cases.

- **Do not believe, for even a moment, the only people who are affected by the conflict are the participants.** Everyone in your office and every employee, with whom the conflicting employees interact, is affected by the stress. This contributes to the creation of a hostile work environment for other employees. In worst case scenarios, your organization members

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take sides and your organization is divided. The results of such can be lasting and perpetual negative behaviors in your organization.

Mediating and resolving conflict is challenging, however, it can be eased if employers and their requisite leaders understand and are willing to accept it as an integral part of their role. The willingness of employers to create an environment conducive to harmonious work relations and the continuous implementation and maintenance of such by leaders, sets the stage for the success of the organization. Crafting an environment that enables the success of the people who work there is a key step in the mediation of workplace conflict. Employers and leaders must remember that this process is continuous and thus workplace conflict resolution is a prime example of "practice makes perfect."