

Katz, N. H., & Flynn, L. T. (2013). Understanding Conflict Management Systems and Strategies in the Workplace: A Pilot Study. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 30, 4, 393-410.

In this article Katz and Flynn (2013) present the results of their study of workplace leaders' and managers' awareness, perception, and use of conflict management systems and strategies. Using a mixed-method design the authors conducted interviews and surveys in public, private, and nonprofit organizations. The study is significant because "conflict in the workplace is on the rise and will continue to go up; however, many leaders and managers are not fully aware of structures and processes available to manage it" (Katz & Flynn, 2013, p. 393). The study revealed some areas that conflict scholars and practitioners can address. For example, there is a lack of a clear definition of the issue, the absence of integrated conflict management systems within most organizations, and dissatisfaction with antiquated grievance systems.

Conflict in the workplace is a natural and normal occurrence. Roloff (1987) defines workplace conflict as, "members engaging in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (as cited in Katz & Flynn, 2013, p. 396). When not handled effectively conflict can have a devastating impact on the organization. The key to handling workplace conflict is to develop management skills, so that you maximize the constructive functions of conflict. Conflict within the organization context can be triggered by a variety of factors, for example, "differences in human relations, confusing organizational structures, competition among members and units for scarce resources, budget cuts, employee layoffs, job expansion, and global competition (Katz & Flynn, 2013, p. 396). The three key elements that influence conflict in the workplace revolve around power, organizational demands, and worth.

With a goal of understanding the use of conflict management systems in the workplace, Katz and Flynn (2013) interviewed twenty-five managers and collected survey data from 219 employees. The researchers found four themes. 1) There is little awareness of how much conflict affects an organization's performance and finances; 2) The types of conflicts are varied; 3) Leaders and employees hold differing definitions of conflict and views on the effectiveness of any systems in place; 4) There is little awareness of the tools and strategies available to mitigate conflict. In addition, the researchers identified two salient factors that influenced how the organizations managed conflict. First, there is a link between leadership style, organizational culture, the types of systems used, and perceptions of effective conflict management. For example, organizations that had flexible leaders, also had favorable employee attitudes toward conflict. Second, organizations using innovative conflict management practices, also had a high level of cultural competency, and were flexible with their conflict management strategies, such as, learner-centered training for communication skills, conflict management, and job awareness (Katz & Flynn, 2013). Overall, the researchers found that conflict management systems are not employed in the workplace as frequently as previously thought, which identifies an area of future study and praxis for scholars and practitioners.