

Institutionalizing Sustainable Conflict Management in Organizations: Leaders Networks, and Sensemaking

Liu, Leigh Anne, Lin Inlow, and Jing Betty Feng. "Institutionalizing Sustainable Conflict Management in Organizations: Leaders, Networks, and Sensemaking." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2014): 155-176.

The costs of ill-managed conflicts within organizations are often very high. What will make effective conflict management in an organization sustainable? This article shows that the institutionalization process is influenced by many different factors that are socially constructed within an organization such as the involvement of multiple people in varying positions, social networks, and the ways that conflict are discussed. Because of so many influencing factors there are also many different ways that organizations manage conflicts that occur within their midst ranging from the adversarial approaches of gossip or bullying, to more constructive approaches like mediation and negotiation. The question here is how do organizations establish rules, procedures, and norms that become guidelines for constructive and sustained conflict management?

The author's research suggests that organizations that have conflict resolution processes that are more institutionalized have employees who are more optimistic about the usefulness and success of their conflict management programs. They also conclude that in order for those institutional practices to become socialized throughout the organization the social networks are the most central. Meaning that organizations have to make sure that their conflict resolution programs are integrated in such a way that they are frequently referenced, legitimately supported, and generally considered as valuable. When the conflict resolution systems are ingrained in this way then the program is not only being triumphed and advocated for by the official spokesperson or liaison, but those who are not necessarily obligated to the program also consider, and advocate for it, in high regards. The strength of this social networking component is what ultimately strengthens and sustains a successful conflict management program.

Some of the products of a well-established conflict resolution program:

1. Conflict resolution committee or ombudsperson
2. Legitimized liaison responsibilities in formal job descriptions
3. Changes in grievance policies that allow interest-based processes that focus on the underlying needs that disputants might have, not only the literal issue at hand.
4. Creation and use of an organization-wide mediation program
5. Development of that mediation program on both the subsidiary and organizational level

Organizations and individuals can increase their conflict management effectiveness by considering the above factors. Generally, the authors advocate for programs that are not regarded as a hindrance but are supported institutionally as a useful and legitimate part of a healthy workplace. When the stigmas are lessened and individuals feel like their interests are being considered in a meaningful way then they also become advocates of the conflict resolution system and are more likely to think highly of it as a tool for dealing with conflicts they may face.

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