



## WHAT IS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

**Dispute Settlement on its own doesn't resolve conflict; Conflict Resolution on its own leaves value on the table; but Conflict Management is holistic: its purpose is to harness the opportunities embedded in conflict.**

Conflict can exist without disputes. Disputes, however, can't exist without conflict – they are manifestations of conflict. Disputes, clashes and interpersonal crises are conflicts that are active. They bring underlying problems to the surface - and that can be very useful.

Dispute Settlement is something of a band aid: it seeks to resolve situations emanating from conflict by attending to symptoms rather than causes.

That may be appropriate in certain circumstances. For example: a management directive, an employee's termination or a resignation all act to settle disputes.

Disputes have to be settled but conflicts need to be resolved. Mediation, Alternate Conflict Resolution, facilitation, arbitration, grievance procedures, and the proven resources within HR, are essential components of a Conflict Management toolbox.

Conflict Management means attention to aspects of conflict *after* resolution; like...

***Organisations that manage differences in a constructive and sustainable manner can realize substantial gains in productivity, cost savings, and interpersonal and workplace morale.***

Association for Conflict Resolution, Washington DC

- Why did it happen?
- What was learned?
- Could the resolution be applied in other areas of the organisation?
- What innovative ideas that came out of the dialogue?
- How could the process be improved?
- Did it take too long?
- Did it involve others and if so, why?
- Was there unwanted interference?
- Was there appropriate support?



And most importantly, have the disputants improved the way they handle conflict?

These questions are then used to continuously improve the way in which conflict is managed by the organisation.

### **CONFLICT FOR CHANGE AND GROWTH: THE REAL GOAL IS TRANSFORMATION.**

Conversely, leaving that value on the table would be equally absurd.

Minimising losses and adverse change from conflict in the long term is dependent on:

1. the conflict culture of an organisation
2. the conflict strategy of an organisation
3. the conflict competencies of its workforce
4. the quality of resources available to employees – particularly access to authentic 'Safe Space'

***There are four basic principles that underlie a corporate conflict management system:***

- 1. Conflict prevention is the first goal. It is literally true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.***
- 2. When conflicts do happen, they should be resolved as quickly as possible. The longer they remain unresolved, the more drain they put on performance.***
- 3. Conflicts are best addressed as directly as possible with those who are involved. Corporate culture and employee training should support this goal.***
- 4. Conflicts should be dealt with at the most informal level of dispute resolution possible. Arbitration and litigation are always options for resolving conflicts. But better that a conflict be resolved through informal dialogue between the parties or in mediation than having to resort to the more formal alternatives. This principle follows from the previous two. Solutions at the less formal levels will be less costly and more satisfactory.***

Tim Hicks, founder and director of Connexus Conflict Management

In an ideal setting, conflict is managed at the earliest possible time and at the lowest possible level.

But third party involvement in each and every conflict would be ridiculous.

These represent a strategic advantage, and are the foundations of an organisation's inherent culture of Conflict Management.