Adapting CR Processes to Workplace Rules

by Sophia Tutorial

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In this lesson, we'll discuss some methods for adapting the conflict resolution process to fit the needs of different workplace cultures. The particular areas of focus include:

1. The Workplace as a System
2. Rules Affecting the Conflict Resolution Process
   a. Channels of Communication
   b. Contracts
   c. Status/Role
   d. Appropriateness
3. Adapting the Different Resolution Processes

1. The Workplace as a System

As you learned previously, a **system** is a set of components that work together to produce a final outcome.

A workplace also functions that way; there are different departments involved in producing an idea or project. The project goes through many different channels to reach the final outcome.

<table><tr><td>🗋</td><td>TERM TO KNOW</td></tr></table>

Systems
A set of components whose behaviors affect one another, causing a sequence of related events leading towards an outcome.

2. Rules Affecting the Conflict Resolution Process

In order for systems to work, there need to be some rules, norms, and procedures. Workplace rules exist in all organizations, and these rules can be either formal or informal.

⤻ EXAMPLE More formal rules might be those concerning dress code, travel policy, or arrival time.

Informal rules, norms, or traditions might exist in terms of how people interact with one another. In some workplace cultures, the rules are a little more conservative; in others, they're more relaxed.

Every organization has **formal/informal workplace rules,** and these rules will affect the way the conflict resolution process works in a particular organization. Some rules and procedures that commonly affect the conflict resolution process are:

- Channels of communication
- Contracts
- Status/role
- Appropriateness

📄 TERM TO KNOW

Formal/Informal Workplace Rules
Written or generally understood or consented to norms that govern individual's choices and actions within a given workplace.

2a. Channels of Communication

Channels of communication are the procedures or guidelines for how people communicate within an organization. Some organizations' channels are more direct, while others are more hierarchical.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE Say that as an employee, you don't have a particular status; you just work for the company. You have some questions and issues about an email that came down from the vice president's office, and you have to consider how the channels of communication work in your organization. Is it an open office in which you can just go in and talk to the vice president? Or do you have to go through your supervisor, who will then talk to their manager, who will go up to the director, who will go to the VP?

In other words, the channels of communication are simply the rules that you follow in terms of how you communicate.

📄 TERM TO KNOW

Channels of Communication
An established set of relationships or procedures for communicating information within an organization or workplace.

2b. Contracts

Particularly in relation to union and labor, there are often contracts that determine how a dispute or a conflict in the workplace would be handled.
In these situations, you, as the conflict-resolver, would have to pay attention to the contract when determining how you to adjust any kind of resolution process in that organization.

2c. Status/Role

The importance of status and role within an organization can also affect the resolution process.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE Say you have a conflict with your manager. Depending on your status and role within the organization, you might be be able to go directly to your manager, or you might have to go through your

supervisor first.

If you have a conflict with a client for whom you are working on a project, status and role also have to be considered. You need to know the procedures for addressing issues with a paying client. Depending on your status and role, you may be able to deal with the client directly, or you might have to involve someone else from the organization.

2d. Appropriateness

Another factor that can affect the resolution process is whether the organization considers the conflict appropriate for conflict resolution.

⤳ EXAMPLE If the conflict involves any type of harassment or discrimination, some organizations would handle the conflict through the Human Resources department or legal channels.

Also in terms of appropriateness, some organizations may prefer a particular conflict resolution process over others.

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3. Adapting the Different Resolution Processes

When choosing a conflict resolution process, you, as the conflict-resolver, want to accommodate the rules of the workplace.

However, there may be times when you could ask for an exception because a rule itself is causing the issue.

⤳ EXAMPLE Say there is a conflict between a couple of individuals in an organization who don't talk to one another because of the hierarchical channel of communication. In order to resolve the conflict, it might be necessary to bring these individuals together. This would be a situation in which you could ask for an exception in order to explore changing the rule or working around it.

But in terms of accommodating the rules, you have a variety of choices to work with as a conflict resolver. Four methods that you can choose from when organizing an intervention are:

- *Conciliation*: This method might be appropriate in situations involving a conflict between a couple of employees, or an employee and a manager, where are there are geographical or time constraints. Because many companies are now global, people can work with others from across the country in different cities and time zones via telecommuting. Conciliation enables the conflict resolver to speak to each party separately and relay messages back and forth in conflict situations where the parties cannot meet face to face.
- *Arbitration*: This method is often written into labor or union contracts as the method of choice in certain organizations. If there is a conflict that prescribes arbitration, then that is the resolution method you would need to use.
- *Mediation*: This method is ideal because it brings the parties together in the same room to work on the conflict with a mediator. If the organization allows you to bring the parties face to face, mediation is often the best route for conflict resolution.
- *Mediation-Arbitration*: This method can be used in times when you get an indication from the boss or the manager that you only have a certain amount of time to reach an agreement. If you can't reach an agreement within that time, then the company wants to move to arbitration; you would have to take your

signals from the organization's rules. In that case, you might want to use mediation-arbitration, or med-arb. This means that you start the process as a mediation, and if the parties cannot come to an agreement, you, as the mediator, can step in as an arbitrator and make the final decision.

⭐ **BIG IDEA**

Any of these resolution processes can be adapted to fit the workplace culture and the rules governing that culture. It's important that you, as an intervener, look at the processes that you have available to you, become familiar with the workplace culture, and then adapt the processes so that they can help resolve the conflict in the best way possible for the parties involved.

📋 **SUMMARY**

In this lesson, you learned that you can look at the **workplace as a system**; a workplace is made up of different departments and people, or components, that each perform a job that is essential to a final outcome. Like systems, all workplaces have their own formal and informal rules, and these **rules can affect the conflict resolution process**. Workplace rules such as **channels of communication**, **contracts**, **status/role**, and **appropriateness** must be considered when implementing conflict resolution within an organization.

You now understand that while you can sometimes ask for an exception if a rule itself is causing the conflict, the conflict resolution method should fit within the rules and guidelines put forth by the organization. In terms of **adapting the different resolution processes**, you as the conflict resolver will likely need to choose from **conciliation**, **arbitration**, **mediation**, or **mediation-arbitration**, depending on the rules and needs of the organization. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

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