

# Building Conflict Capability to Support Employee Well-Being

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## We Will Explore:

- Impacts of unresolved conflicts in the workplace
- Strategies and conceptual framework for building conflict capability, including:
  - Interpersonal conflict skill development
  - Coaching employees through conflict
  - Third-party support (informal mediation processes, etc.)
- The case for building conflict capability to promote employee well-being

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What's Your Bus Story?



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## Impacts of Unresolved Conflict in the Workplace

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## Costs of Unresolved Conflict

- According to the CPP Global Human Capital Report (2008)
  - 27 percent of surveyed employees reported personal attacks that stemmed from escalating conflicts
  - 25 percent witnessed conflict that resulted in sickness or absence
  - Employees spend nearly three hours a week dealing with conflict
  - 10 percent reported that workplace conflict led to project failure
  - 1/3 said that conflict resulted in someone leaving the company, either through firing or quitting
- Managers spend 18% – 26% of their time dealing with workplace relationship issues (Kenneth Thomas)

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## Impact on Performance

In survey of people reporting on rudeness at work:

- 48% decreased work effort
- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
- 63% lost time avoiding the offender

(Pearson and Porath, 2009)



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## Impacts on Health

- Amygdala hijacking : One uncivil act → Stress → Flood of negative emotions → Physiological responses (increased heart rate, erratic breathing, etc.)
- Covert worse than overt: “Daily hassles” more likely to create bad feelings and impair work functions than major life stressors
- Impacts of stress-fueled rudeness:
  - Fatigue, weight loss/gain, headaches, gastrointestinal illness, high blood pressure, muscle tension, sleep disturbances
  - Cognitive dysfunction (motivation, confidence, concentration, etc.)
  - Emotional (anxiety, pessimism, depression, irritability, etc.)

(Pearson and Porath, 2009; and sources cited therein)

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## Definition and Conceptual Framework for Building Conflict Capability

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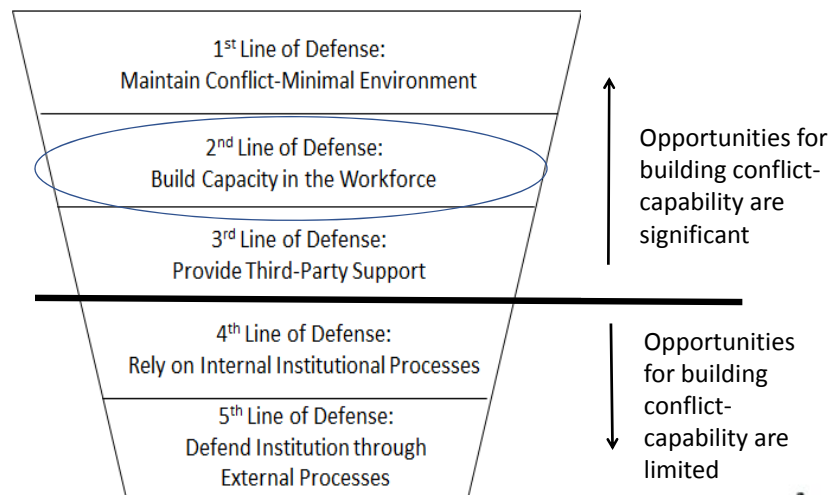
## Definition: Building Conflict Capability

- Putting into the hands of employees the skills, tools and strategies to address their own conflict situations and communication challenges
- In order to:
  - Support early intervention to address conflict and avoid escalation
  - Minimize reliance on formal internal resources (HR, equity office, etc.) which often involve policy responses (investigation, adjudication, etc.) and limit opportunities to address relationship issues

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### Building Conflict Capability – “Lines of Defense”



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## 2<sup>nd</sup> Line of Defense: Build Capacity in the Workforce to Manage Conflict

- Provides employees the opportunity to develop capability to resolve their conflicts through direct means
- Why?
  - Employees are their own best advocates
  - They are in the best position to speak for themselves and avoid having their deepest needs and aspirations distilled by others

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## Strategies for Building Conflict Capability

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## Building Capacity to Resolve Conflict Occurs Through:

- Skill-based training specifically focused on conflict-related issues and topics
- Coaching employees through conflict
- Building capacity among more than “specialists” to help others with conflict situations (e.g., informal in-house mediators)

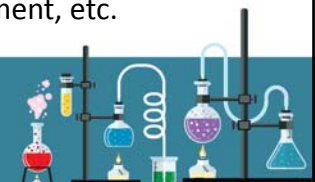
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## Conflict Capability Training

- Examples:
  - Assertiveness
  - Team dynamics
  - Negotiations
  - Raising difficult issues
  - Personality and team differences
  - Emotional intelligence
  - Workplace civility
  - Compliance training with scenario discussions, skills development, etc.

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## Coaching Employees through Conflict - Definition

- The process of providing support and guidance to employees to build their capacity to address workplace conflict situations directly rather than through reliance on third-party interveners to facilitate or decision makers to dictate outcomes

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## Coaching Employees through Conflict – Goals

- Analyze situation causing conflict
- Help visualize improved relationship/situation
- Inquire what person envisions as possible approaches
- Help identify the best strategies for addressing conflict
- Teach conflict resolution skills and/or identify such resources
- Provide practice and role-play opportunities
- Establish how you will support individual after coaching

Key to effectiveness: Empower individual to decide for self

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## Who Can Be a Coach?

- HR Professionals
- Managers and Leaders
- Peers
- Specific roles: Ombuds, Equity Officers and Advocates, other conflict specialists, etc.

Limitations: Role may limit extent of support (e.g., manager is source of conflict; if HR professional is ultimate decision-maker)

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## Coaching Process

(Before Employee Attempts to Respond to Situation)

- Uncover the story
- Analyze causes & relative contribution by employee vs. “other”
- Identify possible responses
- Select the most viable response
- Identify skills and strategies to implement the response
- Identify employee’s confidence and capability to use skills and/or implement strategy
- Support skill/strategy development and implementation

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## Typical Approaches Upon Receiving Coaching

- Do nothing, but monitor (keep coach updated)
- Receive advice, return for more coaching when ready
- Continue coaching to develop skills and coping mechanisms
- Confront individual on own (coaching relationship remains confidential)
- Suggest third-party assistance with HR and/or coach support
- Request coach's intervention (informal Ombuds, mediator)
- File grievance/pursue discipline

Best advice (usually): Individual confronts situation directly

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## Third-Party Support (Informal Mediators)

Office of Equal Opportunity  
900 Indiana Avenue, #1054  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317-274-2306

**IUPUI**  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY-PURDUE UNIVERSITY  
Indianapolis

### Mediation Training 2015

IUPUI's Office of Equal Opportunity offers mediation training. Particularly beneficial to anyone involved in the dispute resolution process, this course provides skills to help overcome communication challenges between individuals and among small groups. Registration is open to the IUPUI campus and the general public.

**Program objectives and activities include:**

- Mediation process demonstration and overview
- Instruction and practice of the step-by-step mediation process
- Realistic role plays to give participants practice in conducting mediation sessions
- Discussion of the role, responsibilities, and characteristics of an effective mediator
- Defining the mediator's relationship with administrative offices
- Exploring and practicing complex conflict situations and mediation challenges (days 4 and 5)

For registration information, call OEO at 317-274-2306

Deadline: Please register by June 13, 2015  
Fee: A \$350 fee\* includes five days of training, break service, training material, and textbook.  
\*Lunch is on your own. There are several options near the meeting space.  
\*Meal/Travel fee June 23, 2015

Participants must attend all five days. No refunds or fee adjustments will be made for participants who attend only part of the training.

Note: A minimum of 15 participants is required or the course will be canceled. If canceled, any fees will be refunded.

**Where:** Campus Center  
**When:** July 14, 15, 16 and July 29, 30  
8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Approval for 20 (general) recertification credit hours toward PHR, SPHR, and CPHR recertification through the HR Certification Institute has been requested.

For more information about certification or recertification, please visit the HRCI at [www.hrci.org](http://www.hrci.org)

**Neutral Conflict Resolution**  
IPFW.edu • Human Resources • Neutral Conflict Resolution

Neutral Conflict Resolution | NCR Representatives | Request Assistance | NCR Agreement & Feedback

Frequency Asked Questions

### Neutral Conflict Resolution Program

Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) believes in a work environment where employees strive to work constructively together. We recognize that employees will have disagreements and that it is important for each person to feel valued and important as they seek a resolution.

The Neutral Conflict Resolution (NCR) program is a resource through which work related disputes, differences and concerns can be resolved at the lowest and least invasive level. NCR uses a mediation framework to help participants develop and create a meaningful outcome. Such outcomes support the university's strategic goal of civility and its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness.

**Benefits of Neutral Conflict Resolution (NCR)**

- NCR can help preserve, repair, and/or improve work relationships.

*"Seek first to understand..." - Stephen Covey*

Website: <https://www.ipfw.edu/offices/hr-oie/employee-relations/neutral-conflict-resolution.html>

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## How a Mediator Makes a Difference



- Helps parties with the *process* of communicating and decision-making
- Helps parties resolve *substantive* matters in dispute (but is not an evaluator, decision maker, or advocate)
- Provides opportunity to assist parties in understanding the root causes of their dispute and heal their relationship

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## Why Establish a Structured Mediation Program?

- What's happening at your institution?
  - How are your grievances/complaints returning?
  - Are processes deadline driven, time/resource consuming?
  - Are work relationships strained?
- What are the perceptions?
- Are those who need to talk, talking?
- Do employees have the needed skills?
- Do employees trust current processes?



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## Benefits of Institutional Mediation Program

- Voluntary process
- Objective, trained third person assists in resolving differences
- Commitment to resolving the difference/dispute
- Outcome control
- Problem solving and conflict resolution
- Communication and relationships
- Privacy - Trust



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## Developing Mediators: Mediation Training

### Mediator Role

- Facilitate discussions
- Explain role, responsibilities, process
- Represent each party equally (neutral, objective, impartial)
- Uncover how's and why's of the dispute
- Avoid value judgments
- Defuse hostile situations; pause or stop a discussion when needed
- Show respect, concern, sensitivity to affected parties
- Manage differences in conflict styles
- Maintain control of the discussion
- Support parties' decision-making process

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## Developing Mediators: Mediation Training (40 hour program)

- Days 1-3
  - Overview, mediator characteristics, role-play demonstration
  - Principles of interpersonal communication, negotiation, and conflict
  - Mediation Process (The Mediation Handbook)
  - Mediation and Ethics
  - Organizational Context (panel of university administrators)
- Days 4-5 (approx. 2 weeks after Days 1-3)
  - More complex situations
  - Multi-party situations; co-mediation
  - Dialogue skills
  - Other contexts for using mediation and conflict resolution skills
- All days are highly interactive
  - Role-plays constitute approx. ½ of total training time
  - Case scenario discussion, exercises, debriefing, Q & A

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## The Case for Building Employee Conflict Capability

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## Pros and Cons for Building Conflict Capability Among Employees

Cons	Pros
Organization relinquishes control of conflict resolution processes . . .	. . . to put control in hands of those most knowledgeable and equipped to respond.
Specialized training and expertise is required . . .	. . . for some issues, not others. Conflict is natural; need to rely more on employees to resolve conflicts within their units.
It becomes a free-for-all . . .	. . . unless you put appropriate controls (checks and balances) in place.
It's the responsibility of specific offices.	Maintaining positive, productive environments is everyone's responsibility. Need to change our organizational mindset.
The program is difficult to manage and keep going.	It can be. Engage in grassroots efforts while building administrative support. Be patient.
We can't have just anybody try to resolve conflicts.	Employees will try anyway with or without the skills. Might as well provide the skills and support.

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## Building Conflict Capability Avoids Discipline (Whenever Possible)

- Human Nature
  - People want to amend our ways
  - Yet become guarded if acknowledging failings will result in penalties
- Formal discipline
  - Destroys trust, good will, positive relationships, especially if appealing to employees' desire to change is possible
  - Removes inclination to change
  - Sends message that "second changes" are not possible
  - Creates a "fight" which is stressful to both manager and employee

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Our Employees Face Significant Challenges Every Day . . .



. . . In Challenging Places and Spaces



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What's Your Bus Story?



"You Can Sit Here if You Want"

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## Choosing Conflict Capability – Helping Others “On the Bus”

- Recognize the call
- Respond in the moment
- Offer a safe place
- Sit with others
- Share the ride
- Bring transformative power
- Support a dignified exit

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