Companies and Conflicts

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Including Data from Doctoral Dissertation Research from Pepperdine University

The Data of Preventing Negative Conflicts

Outline

- Dissertation Research

- Pick a Company

- Pick a Conflict

- Develop 5 usable steps, for managers and neutrals

- Presentation of some data; more available at ClareFowler.com

Why?

- Sharing this data with you to learn how others made conflict a positive experience.

- Hoping you can take it and use it with companies you work with.

Examining Workplaces
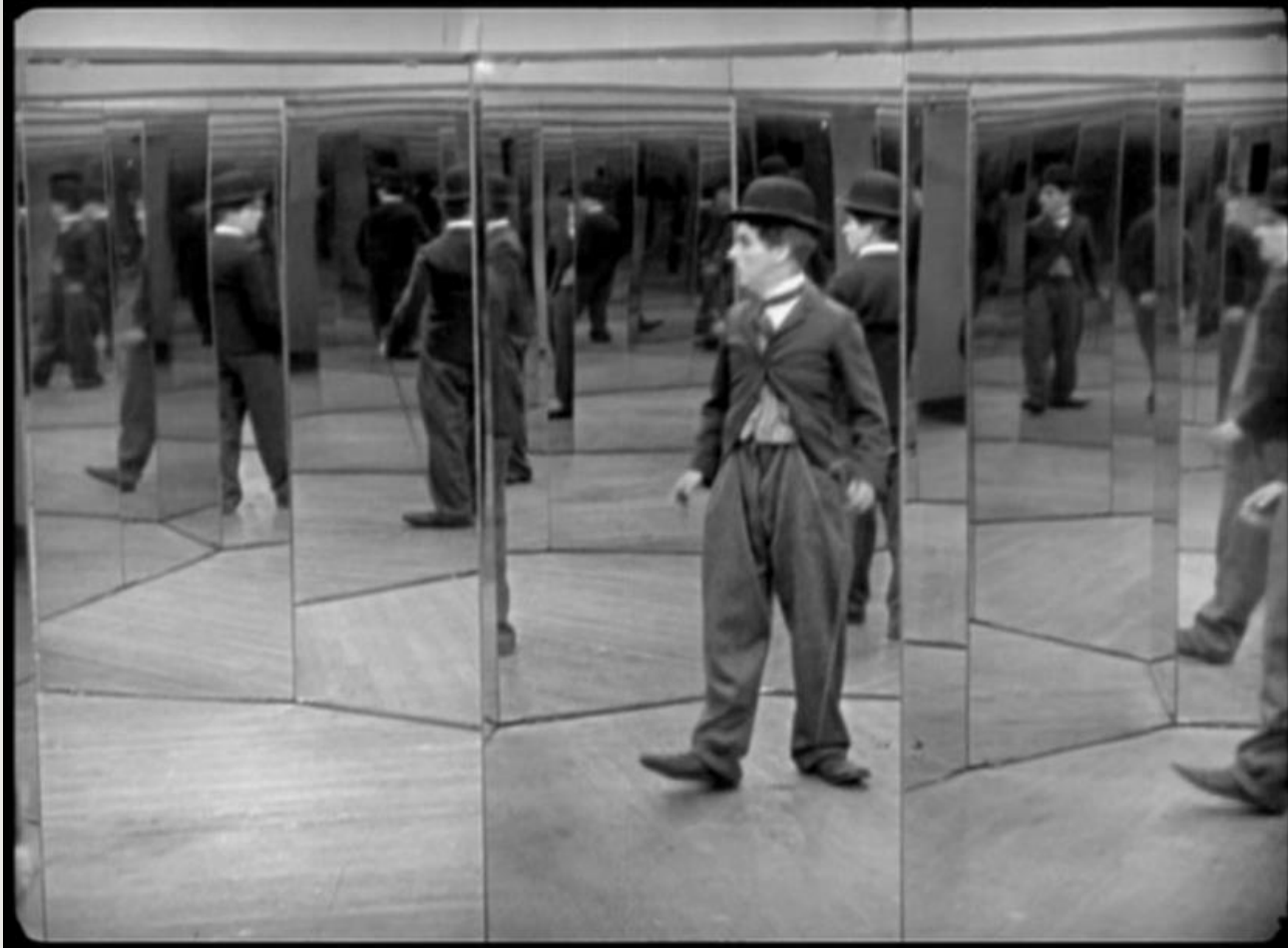
Workplaces are complex systems (Robbins, 1989). From every direction a person looks, they see a different image (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Conflicts

Effective Conflict Resolution Process

Disconnect between conflicts in most businesses and an effective process for resolving those conflicts.

The current dispute resolution options are NOT **effectively** serving small businesses (Small Business Administration, 2004).

The result is that small businesses may be more **negatively affected** by conflict **than they need to be**.

Why do we want a better system?

Resolution	Frequency
Remained Quietly Under the Surface	1431 (40%)
Resolved Amicably	1006 (28%)
Faded Away	740 (21%)
Very Disruptive or Violent	394 (11%)
Total Resolution	**3, 571**

Data Resulted in a 5 Step Method

- T: **Train**. Train your employees in effective conflict resolution, early, and by an outside neutral

- E: **Engage**. Engage your employees by checking-in with them to establish relationship and prevent problems.

- A: **Address**. Address conflict early by having a conversation with all involved.

- C: **Choose**. Let employees choose their method of Conflict Resolution.

- H: **Help**. Get help from an outside neutral when a problem is stuck or systemic.

Conflict Path

Escalation

Exit

Entrance

Pick a Conflict

T: Train

1. Tools instead of regret.

2. Tolerable: Places the conflict within the Window of Tolerance.

3. Trainer that is outside, a mediator, or a neutral, not involved

1) Tools instead of Regret

- "1900 Scientific Management: you ain't got no problem except for the one I tell you you got." = Employees are ROBOTS

- 1920: Idealized Bureaucracy/Human Relations Movement: Hawthorne Experiments, they realized employees performed better when they were paid attention to. = Employees are HUMANS

- 1950: Early Human Resources: Not just paid attention to, but actually listened to? Like create groups that can develop their own policies and be involved in the company? = Employees are ASSETS that like to be listened to.

- 1970: Human Resource Policies: Not just listened to, but protected? They feel safe to complain? = Employees KNOW what is wrong and they have ideas about how to fix it.

- 2000: Systems Theory: Huh, we asked what was wrong; they told us. Now what do we do? We have all of these problems, we need to deal with them and prevent them from happening again. = There are problems—not all of which are the employees' fault. Employees are part of a large SYSTEM.

Systemic Conflicts (404 Conflicts)

- 54% of Conflicts were Internal

- 11% of Conflicts were External

- 34% of Conflicts were Systemic

Why do we care?

- Over half of the companies were two people who couldn't figure out how to talk to each other.
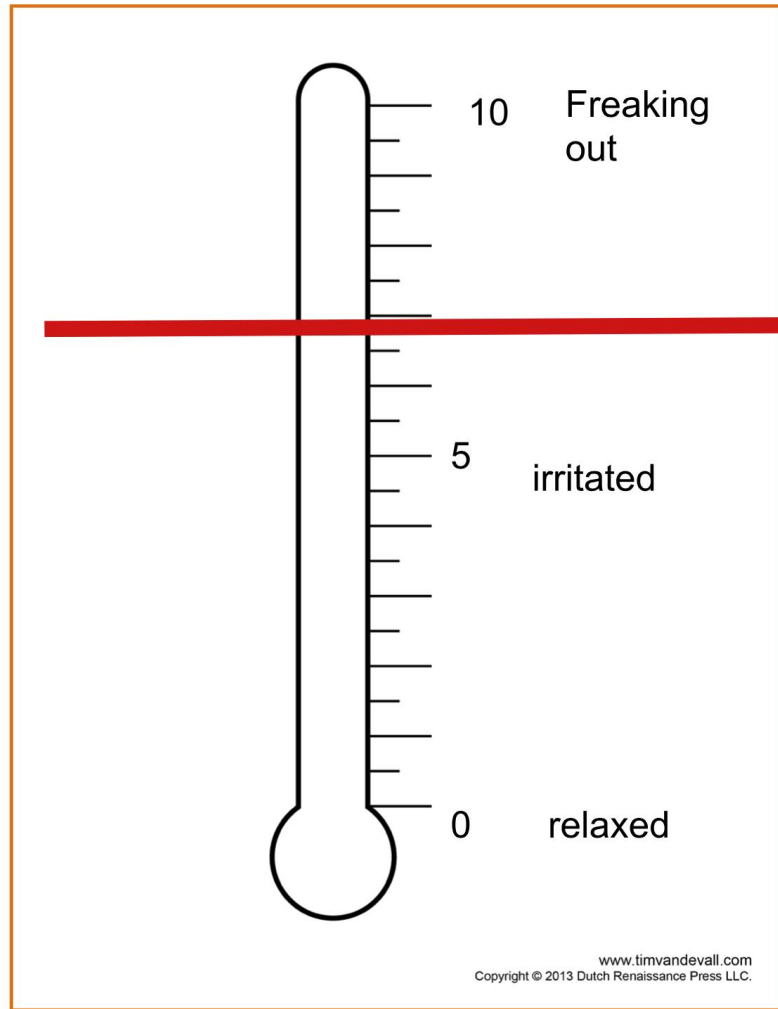
Tools?

THERMOMETER

BLINDERS

STICK IN THE MUD

TURN AROUND

ELF

GARBAGE CAN

10   Freaking
out

5   irritated

0   relaxed

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BELLO!

Blinders

- Past (fear)

- Future (expectations, fear)

Stick in the Mud

Turn Around

- Daddy, I want an Oompa-Loompa Now!
- Conflict Myopia

ELF

- Early

- Logical

- Final

Open Door Policy

- Garbage Can
- People Want to Keep Things Clean—
  - Give them a place to do that
- How do we know that a garbage can is "open," not "full?"

Additional Suggestions

Office availability hours, dedicated, protected time

Open/Closed Door Policy

Model Behavior: Eye contact, speak warmly, establish trust, make an effort to meet with them, let people know when you are available

Specific follow-up time/date, honor follow-up

Ask if OK

Be present: eye contact, pushing distractions aside,

Ease of Access—reach out to new hires, leaflets

Clarity, Boundaries, Respect/Rapport

Tools Instead of Regret?

People want to be involved; they have ideas, and they want to fix what they can!

Effective managers give employees tools to fix the conflict, instead of ignoring and then criticizing them for getting into conflict.

Pre-conflict training allows conflict to stay in the employees' Window of Tolerance, thus engaging the Pre-Frontal Cortex instead of the Amygdala.

Why Tolerable?
- Name
- Positive Outcome
- Time/grounding
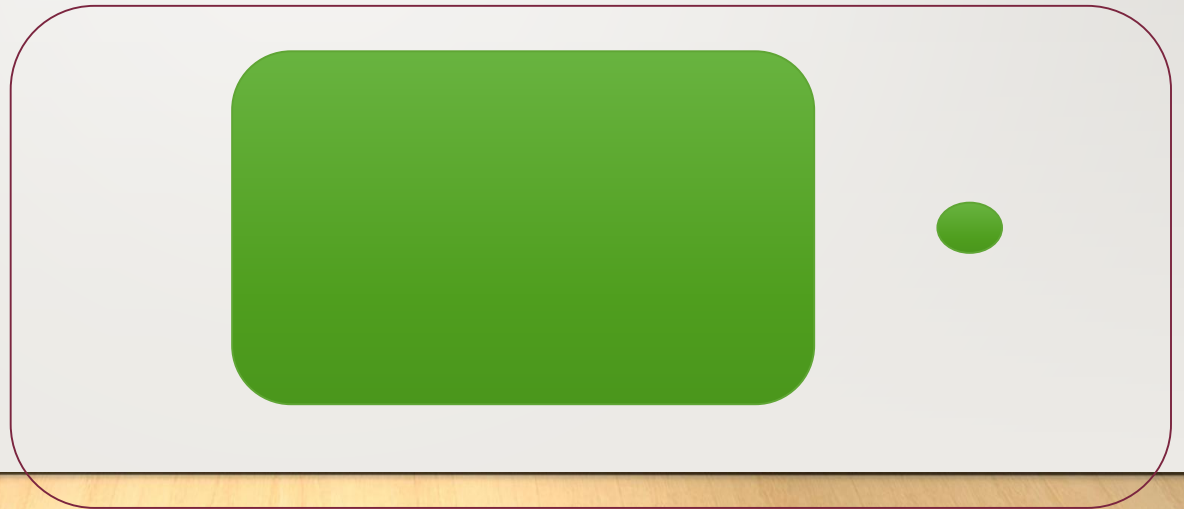
Pre-Frontal Yoda v. AmygDory

I THINK WE NEED TO TAKE A MOMENT.

10 MINUTE BREAK

OFFER TEA.

TONE OF YOUR VOICE HAS CHANGED—DO WE WANT TO TAKE A BREAK?

ASK GROUNDING QUESTIONS--

Train Early

Training before a conflict begins

    a. places that conflict within the Window of Tolerance

    b. helps us to operate like Pre-Frontal Yoda

    c. helps conflicts to stay positive

3) Outside Trainer

Important to have someone outside to establish relationship and to view system.

- 90% of businesses with access to a neutral have experienced a conflict.

- 98% of businesses without access to a neutral have experienced a conflict.

- Businesses with access to a neutral reported that of all of their conflicts, 44% were amicably resolved.

- Those businesses without a neutral reported that only 20% were amicably resolved.

- Neutral might not change amount or type, but changes process and consequence. Neutrals improve experience!

Apply Training

If you could go back in time and design a training that would have prevented this conflict, what would it have included:

- What tools could you give your employees? (paid lunch to discuss issues, Open-Door, etc.)
- What issues could you have named so that people could have tolerated them when they arose? (unclear job description, overlapping tasks, increased workload, etc.)
- What trainer could you have contacted? (someone from department, HR, new employee training/handbook, yearly communications training/review. Etc.)

E: Engage

1) Establish relationship

2) Example good communication

3) Evict Potential problems

Most is BAD COMMUNICATION
(preventable)
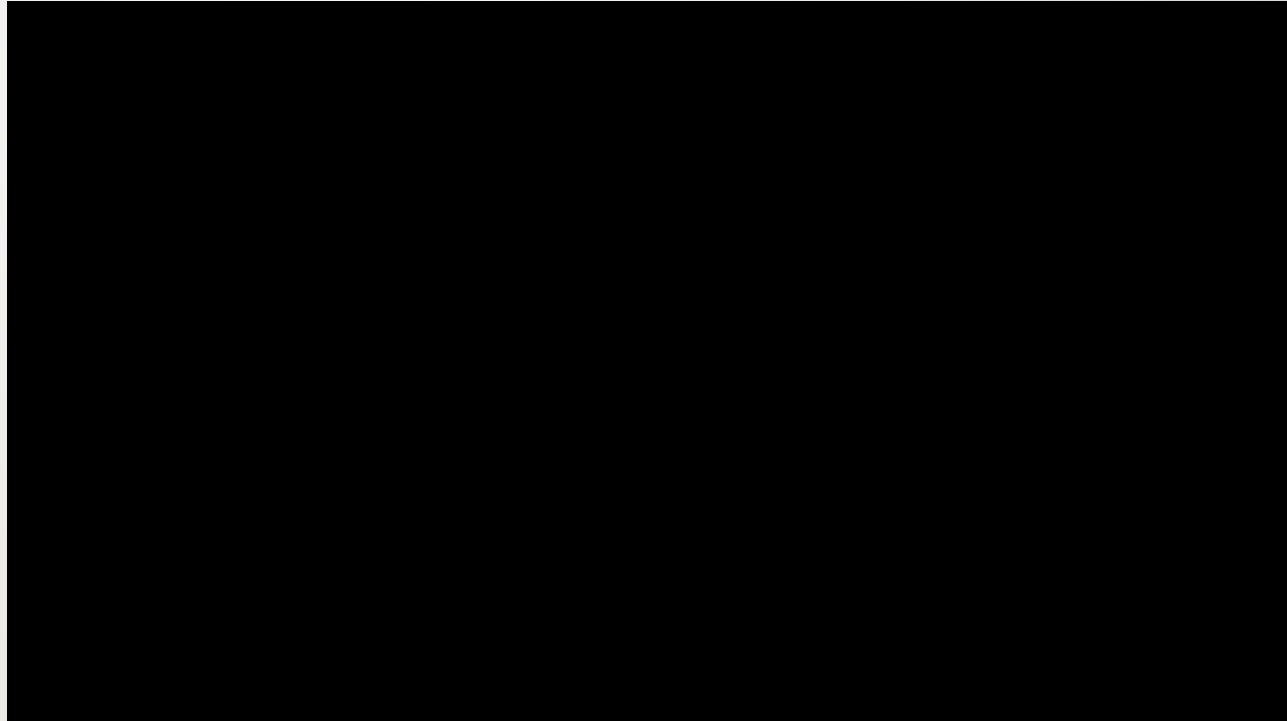
Engage to see Entrances

Theme	Entrance
Bad Communication	60 (23%)
Mean Communication	49 (19%)
Unclear Job Description	23 (9%)
Group/Personality Conflicts	17 (7%)
Entitlement	14 (5%)
Unclear Protocols/ Feedback	14 (5%)
Business Decisions	13 (5%)
Unfair Treatment	11 (4%)
External Customer/Contractor	11 (4%)
Physical Office	10 (4%)
Unappreciated	8 (3%)
Poor Work Ethic	7 (3%)
Unrealistic Deadlines	6 (2%)
Bad Attitude	6 (2%)
Family/Home Issues	4 (2%)
Scheduling	3 (1%)
Discipline	3 (1%)
Cultural Differences	1 (0%)
Not Enough Pay	1 (0%)
Personal Use of Resources/Theft	0 (0%)
Total Identified Conflict Entrances	**261**

Theme	Source
Bad Communication	53 (13%)
Unclear Job Description	43 (10%)
Poor Work Ethic	39 (9%)
Mean Communication	35 (8%)
Unfair Treatment	33 (8%)
Entitlement	30 (7%)
Unclear Protocols/ Feedback	26 (6%)
Cultural Differences	20 (5%)
Physical Office	19 (5%)
Unappreciated	18 (4%)
Business Decisions	17 (4%)
External Customer/Contractor	14 (3%)
Unrealistic Deadlines	13 (3%)
Group/Personality Conflicts	11 (3%)
Scheduling	11 (3%)
Bad Attitude	8 (2%)
Discipline	8 (2%)
Not Enough Pay	8 (2%)
Family/Home Issues	6 (1%)
Personal Use of Resources/Theft	2 (0%)
Total Entrances to Conflict	**414**

Engage and Be an Example

- Engage with employees in the good times so they are comfortable with you in the bad times

- Example good communication: ask questions, criticize privately/praise publicly, don't tolerate gossip

- Call people on bad communication

- Clarify work roles and tasks

What does bad communication, lack of clarity, and unfairness look like?
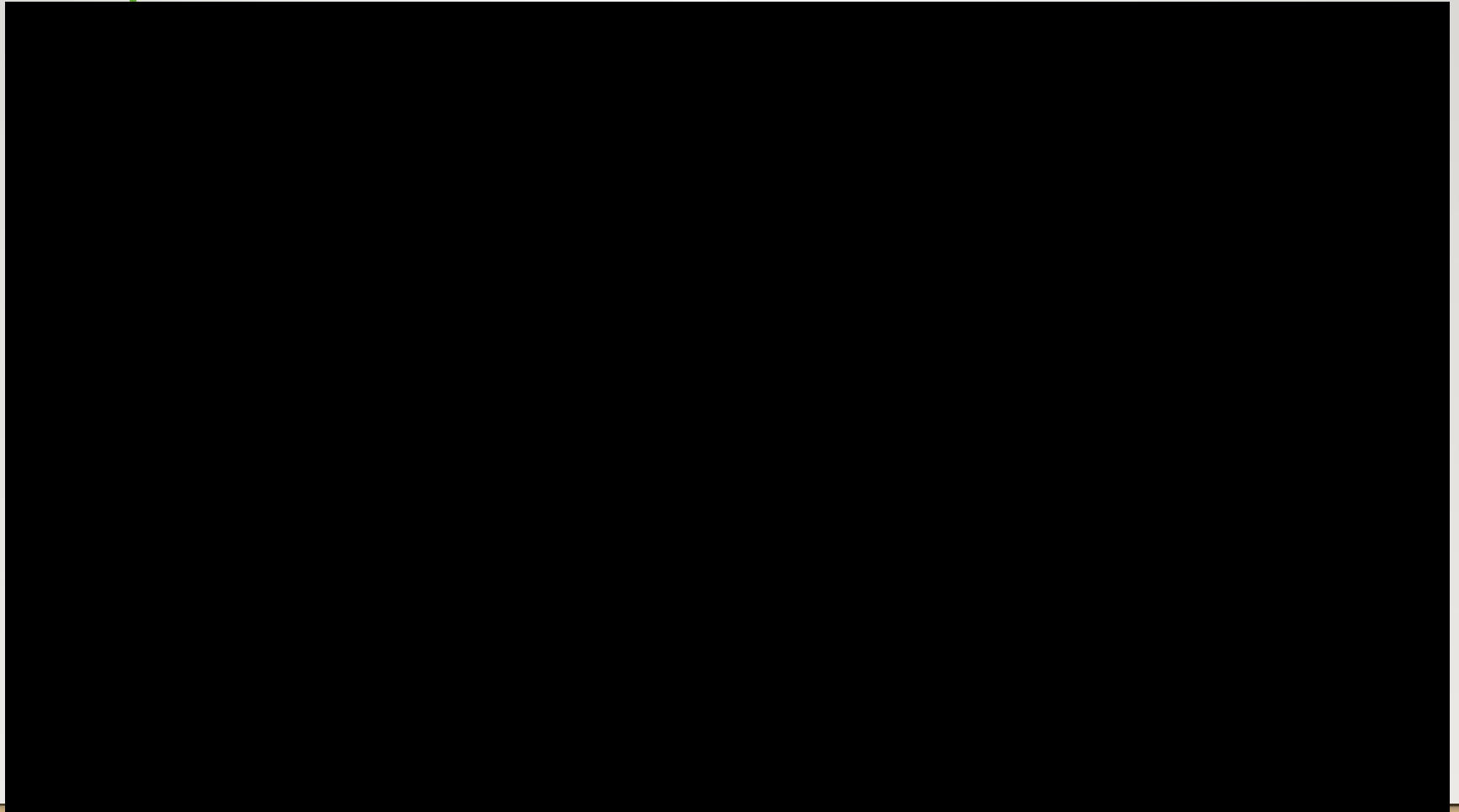
E: Evict Potential Problems

- Prevention: when employees know they have the freedom to meet with a coworker or come to a manager.

- Prevention: when employees know that gossip is not tolerated.

So what? How do we engage?

- What is Bad Communication? How do we address it?

- How do we provide crystal clear clarity for job descriptions and tasks?

- How do we engage in the good times?

- What are potential warning signs of conflict escalating?

A: Address

1) Address it early to keep it positive

2) Address it to save time and money

3) Address it, but managers don't fix it

Address it Early for it to be Positive, Type doesn't determine positivity, Only Process and Timeline
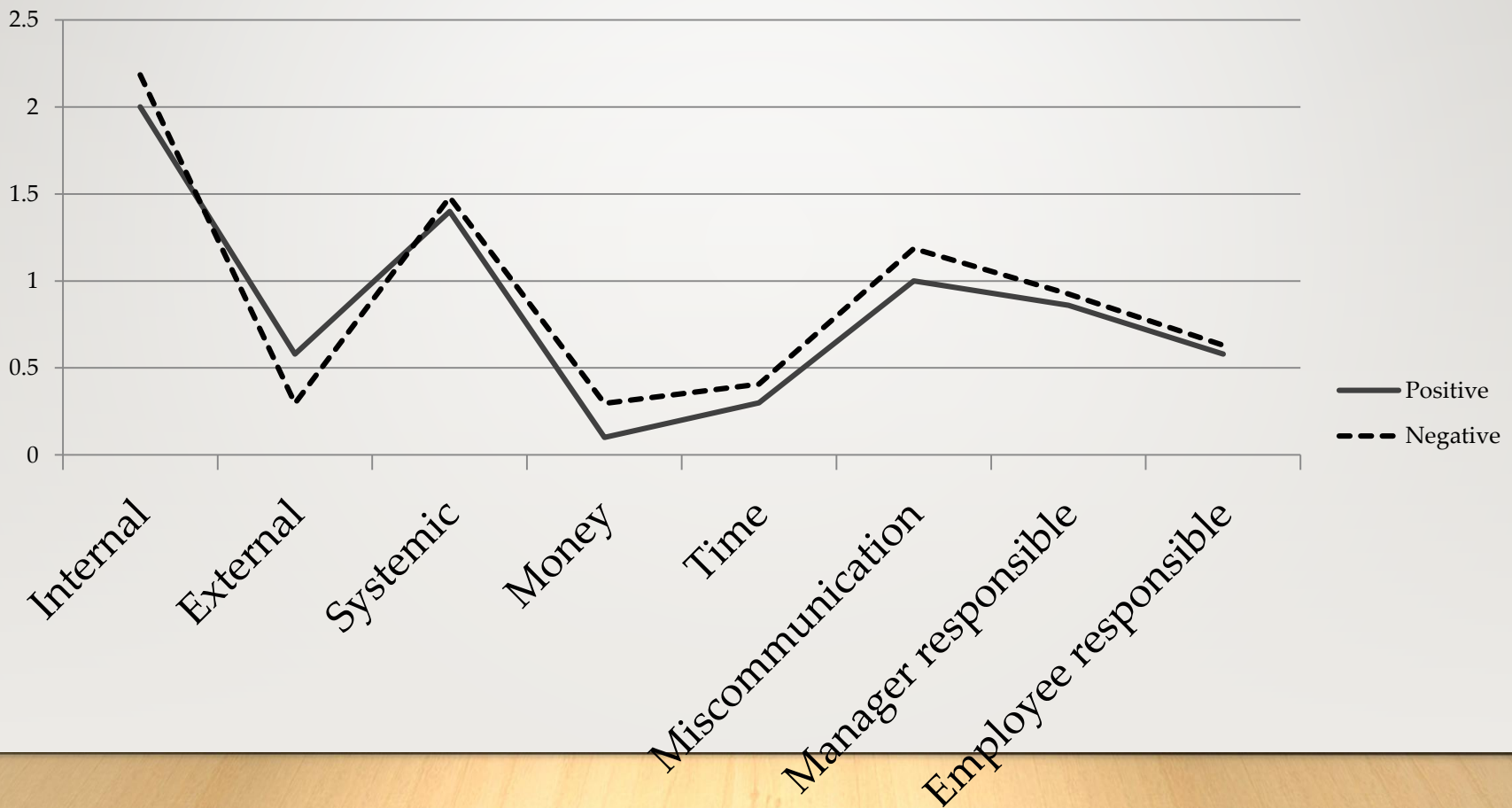
Why Address it Early?

Conflict Exit Suggestions	Frequency
Direct, Honest, Immediate Communication	47 (53%)
Mediation	19 (21%)
Management Intervention	14 (16%)
Not Resolved, But Agreed	3 (3%)
Office Arrangements	2 (2%)
Police/Authority	2 (2%)
Termination	1 (1%)
Training	1 (1%)
Total Identified Exits	**89**

Address it to Save Time, Money

1. **No money** (They typically do not have the resources that a large business would have to study and implement the most effective methods of dispute resolution, organizational structure, or ADR system design (White, 2007).)

2. **No time** (Owners do not have time to learn how to resolve disputes or what ADR options are available.)

3. **One focus** (Solely focused on promoting their product and service and do not want to be distracted by creating a new system.)

4. **Maintain status quo** (Owners are typically attached to an idea and do not want to change, and so most owners have avoided it (Problems Faced by Small Businesses, 2010).)

Saves Time and Money

1. ADR options typically **cost less** than other options. ADR can reduce the cost of expensive litigation for small businesses (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000).

2. ADR **minimizes the time impact** of conflict. Small businesses cannot afford to be ineffective (Lipsky, Seeber, & Fincher, 2003).

3. ADR processes can manage current conflict by providing a small business **protection** from mistakes (Krotz, 2010).

4. ADR can **prevent future conflicts**.

5. ADR can help the business to **become stronger** and build healthier business policies for the future (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000).

What Businesses Need!

Address it -- but don't Fix It

- Determine type of conflict. If systemic or external, bring in necessary resources.

- If internal, ask employees to discuss it immediately and directly.

5 New Small Business Concepts

Five identifiable new concepts that showed up in the data, but not in the literature review:

1. Busy owners,

2. Family atmosphere,

3. Flat business structure,

4. Casual environment, and

5. Invested employees.

How do we Address Conflict?

- WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE SEE IT BREWING?

- WHAT DO WE DO WHEN THEY BRING IT UP TO US?
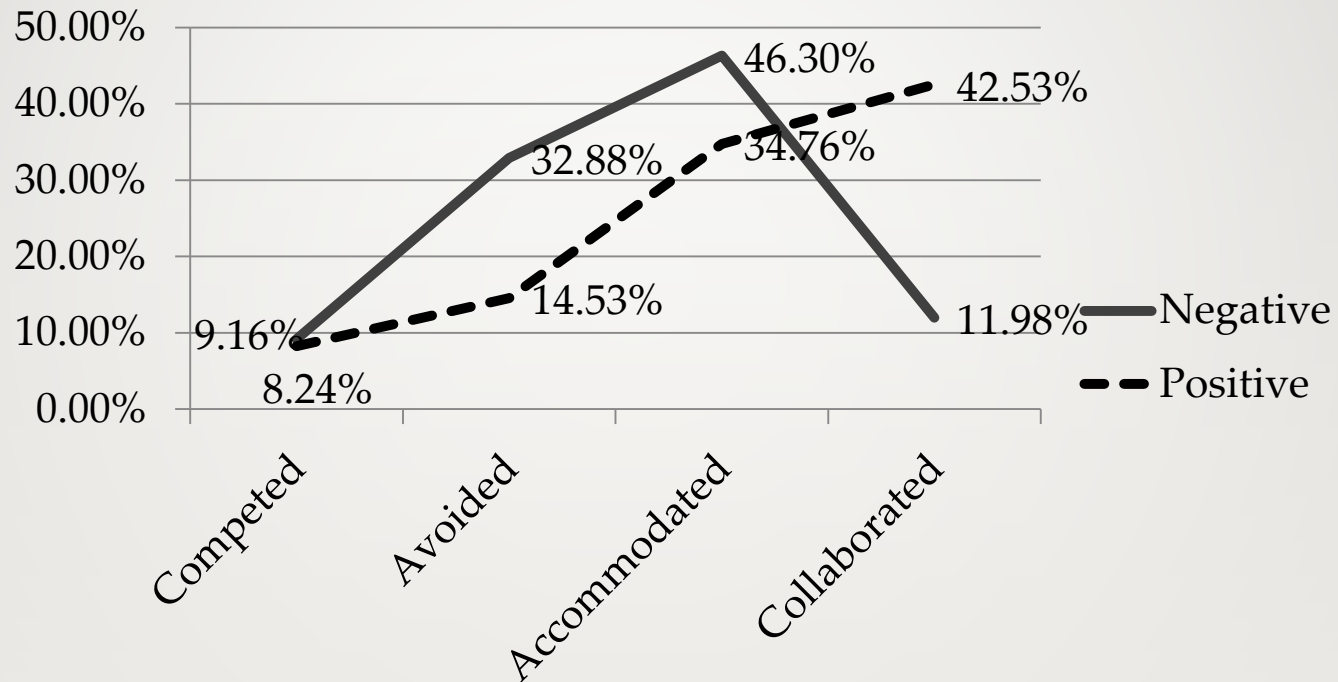
- WHAT DO WE DO WHEN THEY ASK FOR HELP?

C: Choose Process and Outcome

1: Designed by Managers

2: Process Suggested by Managers;
   Chosen by Employees

3: Outcome Chosen by Employees

Design the Choices;
Let Employees Choose

When Employees Choose Process Together, Outcome is More Likely to be Positive

What process would work?

- Look at this list of options—what would work in your office?

Employer Suggestions

Conflict Resolution Suggestions	Frequency
Conversation	21 (10%)
Staff Neutral	15 (7%)
Clearer Policies	11 (5%)
Employee Emotional Intelligence	9 (4%)
Continued Communication Training	9 (4%)
Review Workloads	4 (2%)
Managers Keep Doors Open	4 (2%)
Direct Resolution as Condition of Employment	3 (1%)
Mediation as Condition of Employment	3 (1%)
Emotional Intelligence Survey	3 (1%)
Equal Pay, Hours, Workload, Consequence	3 (1%)

C: Outcome Chosen by Employees

- This requires a lot of trust from employers.

- Looking at workplace history, however, shows that employees perform better when they are given this type of trust.

- Build together slowly.

Choice =

MANAGERS DESIGN PROCESSES

EMPLOYEES CHOOSE PROCESS

EMPLOYEES CHOOSE OUTCOME

C: Let Employees Choose

- What are some processes that a manager should put in place?

- What steps can a manager take to give the ownership to the employees?

H: Help.

1. H: Help From someone familiar

2. H: Helping when problems are Stuck, Systemic, or Buried

3. H: Help when it's management or external

4. Make it Positive!

H: Help From someone familiar

- Preferably Same Neutral who did Pre-Conflict Training.

- Needs to be someone neutral.

- Neutral might be someone on staff, but make sure it is someone from a different department.

- Needs to be someone that employees trust/is familiar with their culture

H: Helping when problems are Stuck, Systemic, or Buried

- Stuck: If employees are trying to resolve it and not getting anywhere--AmygDory

- Systemic: when employers are seeing the same problem crop up again and again

- Buried: When employers realize there is a lot brewing under the surface

Remained Quietly Under the Surface	1431 (40%)
Resolved Amicably	1006 (28%)
Faded Away	740 (21%)
Very Disruptive or Violent	394 (11%)

H: Help When It's Management

- 70% of those interviewed reported that all conflicts involved or were caused by employees;

- 46% of those conflicts also involved managers;

- 23% of businesses reported that their conflicts were most commonly caused by someone outside the company, such as a vendor or a client.

What Made the Negative Conflict Negative	
Business issues/Politics	6 (75%)
Competing	5 (63%)
Power Struggle	5 (63%)
Client Issues	4 (50%)
Personal Issues	4 (50%)
Slander/ Gossip	4 (50%)
Waited too long	4 (50%)
Didn't Address Early	3 (38%)
Avoiding	3 (38%)
Accommodating	2 (25%)
POV Myopia	2 (25%)
Shame	2 (25%)
Violence	2 (25%)
Conciliation	1 (13%)
Facilitation	1 (13%)
Insecure Manager	1 (13%)
Mediation	1 (13%)
Negotiation	1 (13%)
Selfish	1 (13%)
System Fosters Competition	1 (13%)
Total Negative Escalations	**53**

What Made the Positive Conflict Positive	
Discussion	4 (50%)
Address Early	3 (38%)
Arbitration	3 (38%)
Comprising	3 (38%)
Conciliation	3 (38%)
Leadership Skills	3 (38%)
Negotiation	3 (38%)
Taking Time	3 (38%)
Vary Agreement by Personality	3 (38%)
Accommodating	2 (25%)
Avoiding	2 (25%)
Business Issues	2 (25%)
Mediation	2 (25%)
POV Myopia	2 (25%)
Client Issues	1 (13%)
Facilitation	1 (13%)
Heal From Past Negativity	1 (13%)

Help: Manager Options

- Let employees use your phone

- Pay for it

- Suggest employees talk during lunch hour plus an hour

- Distribute resolution friendly stuff, showing their support

- Provide Nobel Peace Prize for office-- $100 incentive, gift card to local restaurant, free personal day

Help: Neutral Options

- Discount for training second year, third year, etc.

- Examples of calling for help—posters, funny memes, etc.

- 1-800 number for a help line/ombuddy

- Private email address

- Neutral is available for lunch, after work, via Skype, etc.

Unexpected Consequences

- Few were external: 11% of conflicts were external.

- Few were hot topics: The hot topics (racism, sexual harassment, bullying) were scarcely present; instead bad/mean communication, poor work ethic, and lack of clarity were the main conflict causes.

- Many were positive: 130 negative conflicts, 293 positive conflicts.

Unexpected Culture

5 new small business concepts:

1) Busy owners,

2) Family atmosphere,

3) Flat business structure,

4) Casual environment, and

5) Invested employees.

Unexpected

- Arbitration and Litigation do not seem to be as common as expected. If this is true, then will ADR appear to be a cheaper/more attractive alternative?

- Mediators do not seem to have an impact on the amount of conflicts. Perhaps other methods should be used to minimize the amount of conflicts, and mediators should be used to improve conflict outcome.

Ch. 5: Unexpected

- Process and Consequence seem to be related: Good processes can create a positive conflict experience

- Escalation and Consequence also seem to be related: The Type of Escalation affected if the consequence was positive or negative

- Entrance and Consequence don't: The Entrance to conflict did not seem to affect the outcome of the conflict.

Ch. 5: Recommendations

T E A C H

1. **Train** employees early in communication. Employees and managers develop office communication and conflict protocols—and stick to them.

2. **Engage** with staff/team-building meetings.

3. When a conflict arises, managers must force employees to stake steps to **address** the conflict immediately and directly.

4. All employees involved need to have a conversation about the conflict, using effective communication techniques. Employees should be involved in **choosing** the process and designing the outcome.

5. Bring in a neutral, then a staff mediator, then an external mediator if needed to **help** parties in resolving the conflict.

What can you do? What recommendations can you make?

Take notes from each section and discuss.

Thank you.

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