RUNNING HEAD: ASSESSING OMBUDSMAN NEED

Assessing the Need for an Ombudsman Office at a

Scientific Institute

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Abstract

This paper outlines the conflict management needs assessment I conducted at a scientific institute and the need for an ombudsman office. Intergroup and intragroup conflict within an organization is examined. The main sources of organizational conflict reported are: communication, personality, cultural differences, priorities and role expectations. Organizational conflict is managed by both formal and informal resources. These resources include Human Resources, managers and organizational ombudsmen. The needs assessment was conducted by interviewing ten employees within two different departments of a scientific institute. Subjects reported that the formal sources of conflict management were not adequate to fulfill their conflict needs. An organizational ombudsman, which is an informal, confidential, independent, and neutral conflict management resource, would be an appropriate response to the conflict management needs of employees at this scientific institute.

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Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Assessing the Need for an Ombudsman Office at a Scientific Institute

The term "ombudsman" [1] is a Swedish term that is loosely translated in English to mean "representative" and is intended as a gender-neutral term. According to the International Ombudsman Association, the position is roughly 200 years old (http://www.ombudsassociation.org/). The purpose of an ombudsman in a university setting is to provide a place where all members of the university community (including faculty, staff, students, and researchers) are able to have their voice heard in a confidential manner. An ombudsman provides information about channels available for conflict resolution and provides resources to help foster systemic change. An ombudsman office provides a confidential, informal, neutral and independent resource to the members of the community it serves. (http://www.ombudsassociation.org/)

An ombudsman office does *not* provide visitors with a formal channel to "put the university on notice", in other words, the ombudsman cannot receive official complaints from employees and hold the university or organization responsible for the complaint. Thus, the ombudsman is an informal conflict management resource for an organization.

Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1993) provide a concise and comprehensive description of an ombudsman:

> A central function of the ombudsman, who typically lacks decision-making power, is to be available to listen to grievances, to direct them to the appropriate person, and to see that they are dealt with expeditiously. Often the matter will be resolved if the ombudsman simply listens or provides objective information; if the complaint concerns salary, for instance, the ombudsman may provide information about average salary rates. (p. 48)

Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1993) also describe the ombudsman office at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which does make recommendations. Part

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[1] I will use the term ombudsman unless a different variation is used in quoted text such as ombuds or ombudsperson.

of the charter of the ombudsman office at MIT includes the following mandate: "identify

university practices that are causing disputes and suggest changes in those practices" (p.

61).

According to Kolb and Putnam (1992), conflict in an organization, is rarely

completely resolved; conflict will move throughout an organization and ebb and flow, but

rarely completely disappear (Kolb & Putnam, 1992). There are many different types of

conflict, sources of conflict and ways to manage conflict. This paper will provide a

literature review and background on conflict management within an organization. I have

conducted a conflict management needs assessment of a scientific institute and the need

for an ombudsman office and will report the findings of this study. I seek to answer the

questions: "What are the current conflict management methods at this scientific institute?

Is there a need for an ombudsman at this scientific institute?" Based upon the theory of

organizational conflict management presented, I will assess the need for an ombudsman

office at the scientific institute. The following section will define conflict, outline the

types of organizational conflict, describe sources of conflict and detail some methods for

how conflict can be managed.

Definition of Conflict

The definition of conflict and how it is addressed varies across the field. Deutsch

(1973) defines conflict as one party interfering with the goals of another party. Abel

(1982) defines conflict in terms of resources and differing claims to commonly desired

resources. These two differing definitions do not account for the circumstances

surrounding the conflict. The context of the conflict is important and must be included in

the definition of conflict (Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Accordingly, organizational conflict

may be different than social and all other types of conflict. For the purpose of this paper

I will use Kolb and Putnam's (1992) definition of organizational conflict: "when there are

real or perceived differences that arise in specific organizational circumstances and that

engender emotion as a consequence" (p. 312). The scope of this paper addresses conflict

that occurs within the context of organizations. I will not address social conflict or other

realms of conflict.

Types of organizational conflict

There are a number of types of conflict that occur within organizations. Many

organizations are structured with different groups or departments. Conflict can arise

between groups and within groups. Conflict can occur on the same level of hierarchy or

between levels of the hierarchy such as conflict between peers or conflict between a

manager and a subordinate.

Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup conflict, or conflict between two or more distinct groups or cultures,

occurs at many levels of society including within an organization, between two ethnic

groups, and between two countries (Deutsch, 1973). Intergroup conflict within an

organization mainly occurs between different departments and, according to Deutsch

(1973), is frequently constructive. Constructive intergroup conflict is conflict where

differences between groups are settled in a satisfactory manner to both groups.

Destructive intergroup conflict is conflict where differences are not addressed or settled

in a satisfactory manner to either one or both parties. Such conflict is often rooted in

differences related to access to resources, social power, and values, not

miscommunication or misperceptions (Fisher, 2006). These differences are exacerbated

by believing resources and power are zero-sum where one party must give-up something

in order for the other party to gain something. For the purpose of this assessment, I will

focus on destructive intergroup conflict within an organization.

Burke (2006) eloquently outlines Schein's (1980) description of results and

symptoms of intergroup conflict in the following list:

What occurs *within* the competing groups:
- Each group "closes ranks" and becomes more closely knit and loyal to one another as members
- Group climate becomes more task focused and less informal and casual.
- Group leadership becomes more authoritarian and less participative
- Group structure, for example, member roles and responsibilities, become more formal and tight.
- More loyalty on the part of members to the group is demanded so that a solid front can be maintained.

What happens *between* the conflicting groups:
- The other group is seen as the enemy.
- Distortion of perceptions increase, for example, we are strong, they are weak.
- Hostility between the groups increases
- Members tend to "hear" only those things that support their group's position (Burke, 2006, p. 788).

The above actions can spread to the entire organization and interfere with productivity,

morale, and motivation (Fisher, 2006).

Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict, or conflict that occurs within a group, can take many forms in

an organization. Two of the most common intragroup conflicts are conflicts between

peers and conflict between a subordinate and their supervisor. (Katz and Kahn, 1978a)

Peer to peer conflict. My approach to conflict between peers, or employees at the

same level on the organizational hierarchy, is rooted in interpersonal conflict theory. The

conflict often stems from competition over scarce resources, competition for attention

from a supervisor, and differing opinions about how to best accomplish a task (Burke, 2006). Examples of scarce resources are coveted positions higher on the organizational hierarchy, the best materials, and office/desk space. Another form of peer to peer conflict is bullying. Peer conflicts are not restricted to within a group; they can occur between groups.

Subordinate/supervisor conflict. According to a study by Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994), 60 percent to 75 percent of employees reported that the most stressful aspect of their job was their immediate supervisor. This type of conflict is complicated by the differences in power, real and perceived, between the two parties. The supervisor has the real power to reprimand their subordinate and may have even greater perceived or real power such as the ability to discipline or control employees.

In many organizations, positions of higher power such as supervisor or manager are in scarce supply. This scarcity of a desired resource can cause conflict as subordinates compete and vie for a higher position in the organization while those in the coveted positions compete to keep their positions and/or move to a higher position (Coleman, 2006).

Sources of Organizational Conflict

There are a number of sources of organizational conflict. These sources of conflict are not unique to organizational conflict; however, they can be a common source of conflict in organizations. Some of these sources of organizational conflict are: poor communication, personality, cultural differences, priorities, and differences in role expectations.

Communication

Krauss and Morsella (2006) state that conflict can arise from a lack of communication or miscommunication. Miscommunication is rooted in misperceived intentions (Krauss & Morsella, 2006). For example, what one person says may be perceived by another person as something that was completely different from what was intended. Miscommunication can also manifest when parties speak different languages. Conflict may occur when the literal meaning of a cultural phrase is misinterpreted due to a lack of cultural knowledge (2006) or simply a literal misunderstanding of what a person is saying due to language barriers. Krauss and Morsella (2006) describe communication thusly: "Good communication cannot guarantee that conflict is ameliorated or resolved, but poor communication greatly increases the likelihood that conflict continues or is made worse" (p. 156).

Personality

There is much research on personality, but little research on personality and conflict. The work of Freud and his many followers outline the importance of society in developing personality. Conflict has been discussed in personality literature as it relates to "intrapsychic" (Sandy, Boardman & Deutsch, 2006, p. 334) conflict and very little on interpersonal conflict (Sandy, Boardman & Deutsch, 2006). Intrapsychic conflict is that which occurs within a person (Sandy, Boardman & Deutsch, 2006). This intrapsychic conflict and anxiety will lead to defense mechanisms to protect the psyche. Sandy, Boardman, and Deutsch (2006) define these defense mechanisms as denial, avoidance, projection, reaction formation, displacement, counterphobic defenses, escalation, intellectualization and minimization.

Bandura (1986) describes a person's reaction to conflict as stemming from what he or she has learned from social interactions and their environment. By exposing people to new, constructive models of conflict behavior, people can change how they behave in conflict situations (Bandura, 1986; Sandy, Boardman & Deutsch, 2006). Sandy, Boardman, and Deutsch (2006) expand on Bandura's theory by adding that social situations, when combined with different psychological orientation and personality, can also impact how a person reacts to conflict.

In their study of graduate students, Sandy, Boardman, and Deutsch (2006) concluded that people who, "differ in personality traits may also differ in their approach to conflict and their behavior during conflict" (Sandy, Boardman & Deutsch, 2006, p. 353). Katz and Kahn (1978a) concur that some behavior observed during conflict is influenced by an individual's background and personality.

Cultural Differences

In addition to personality, cultural differences can be a source of conflict. There are two types of culture that I will refer to in this paper: ethnic culture and organizational culture. Most of the literature regarding conflict and culture refers to ethnic culture outside of an organization and does not address ethnic cultural differences as a source of organizational conflict. Avruch (1998) updates Tyler's definition of ethnic culture outlined by Schwarz (1992) by defining culture as what an individual learns from experience and interactions within a specific population. Culture is both socially and psychologically distributed within a population (Avruch, 1998). Basically, culture is "the basis of social reality for all of its members" (Kimmel, 2006, p. 627).

Schein (1990) describes culture within the context of an organization as culture that

can only develop within a defined group of people with a common history. Because

many organizations have multiple groups and departments, there can also be subcultures

within an organization in addition to the overall organizational culture of the organization

at large. Schein (1990), unlike Avruch (1998), defines culture by specifying that culture

is taught to new members. Schein (1990) also specifies that culture defines the

acceptable way to deal with problems in the group.

Conflict can arise from new members entering the group because they bring new

beliefs, assumptions and behaviors. Changes in the environment can also cause conflict

because of the pressure to adapt and learn (Schein, 1990). Organizational culture is thus

fluid and adaptive.

Differences in culture can result in conflict when there is a difference in intended

and received messages as described above. Kimmel (2006) describes how these

differences can be exacerbated:

> The differences between intended and received meanings had to do
> with the context of the communication and the mindsets of the
> communicators. Lacking awareness of cultural differences,
> fundamental attribution errors will reinforce existing images and
> feelings and create or exacerbate misunderstandings, misperceptions
> and conflict (p. 630).

The fundamental attribution error that Kimmel (2006) refers to in the above quote is "the

tendency to assume that perceived negative behaviors exhibited by an unfamiliar person

are a result of personal factors" (p. 630). These misunderstandings and misperceptions

can also be exacerbated by differing levels of language skills. For example, when one

group sends a message to another group, such as a request for a project completion date,

the other group could interpret the message in a number of ways. The other group may

believe that the group is trying to rush the process or is trying to meddle in the other

group's work. This misunderstanding of intentions could cause a conflict.

Priorities of interests and needs

Priorities of a group are the specific needs or interests that a group decides to be the

most important at a specific time. Priorities are fluid and can change over time.

Intergroup conflict can occur when the execution of priorities of the two groups

contradict one another. Katz and Kahn (1978a) and Deutsch (1973) describe the source

of conflict of interest as coming from three different common organizational processes:

"resource getting, throughput, and appropriate disposal of output" (Katz & Kahn, 1978a,

p. 623). Different groups within an organization may have different priority needs in

terms of resources. For example, one group may need a particular resource to conduct an

experiment, while a different group may need the same resource to conduct an

experiment they perceive as a higher level of priority. These two groups may conflict

over the resource if each group feels that its own experiment is the higher priority in

comparison to the other. This type of conflict can be managed by a clarification in level

or priority from an outside influencer such as a person on a higher level on the

organizational hierarchy. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to priorities of

interests and needs of groups, not individuals.

Role Expectations

Members of an organization must learn the expectations of other group members,

accept them, and fulfill the expectations in order to be accepted by the group (Katz &

Kahn, 1978b). Katz and Kahn (1978b) define role behavior as "the recurring actions of

an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to

yield a predictable outcome" (p. 189). In an ideal group, all members have roles that interact with one another to produce a cohesive culture. The group defines role expectations by reacting to specific behaviors that a person should or should not exhibit (Katz & Kahn, 1978b). Roles can be a combination of a job description handed down by a manager as well as intragroup expectations of behavior and attitudes.

Katz and Kahn (1978b) describe a cyclical pattern of role sending and role receiving from person to person that determines role expectations and role behaviors. Conflict can occur when a received role is different than the intended role to be received, or sent. The resulting role behavior is different from what was expected of the individual group member and a conflict can arise. In addition to this unpredictable role behavior, differing expectations and ambiguity can be the source of intragroup conflict. (Katz and Kahn, 1978b)

Managing Organizational Conflict

Some may interchange the terms conflict management and conflict resolution when referring to organizational conflict. Other experts believe that organizational conflict is only managed and never fully resolved. Organizational conflict can be managed, not resolved because organizational conflict is often addressed in a manner that will "rephrase, repress, or redefine them and so they continue to surface again in different ways" (Kolb & Putnam, 1992, p. 317). In other words, conflict in an organization may not be fully resolved, however, it can be addressed with a remedy that may quell the initial differences between parties but may not address the underlying root causes of the differences. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to addressing conflict as managing conflict with the caveat that fully resolving conflict is ideal, but not always possible.

Conflict within an organization is managed in many different ways and can be dependant on the structure of the organization (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Kanter, 1977; Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Pettigrew, 1973, Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Organizations often have both formal and informal means of addressing conflict. Some examples of formal channels of conflict management are a human resources department and an employee union. Informal channels of addressing conflict can vary by organization and are dependant on the culture of the organization (Schein, 1985). Some examples of informal conflict management are manager mediation, avoidance and ombudsman offices.

Formal Conflict Management

An organization has limited formal conflict management resources because of the formal structure. These formal resources are restricted to the policies and procedures outlined by the organization. Formal conflict management channels often have written records of conflict that are kept by the organization.

Human Resources. An example of formal conflict management within an organization is the Human Resources Department. The HR Department is considered a formal channel for employees because it is a place where records of conflict are kept in employee files. Employees are also able to "put the organization on notice" through the HR Department. Legal action, a formal conflict management tool, is also possible through the HR Department. Depending on the structure and mandates of an organization, the HR Department may be a conflict *management* resource and not a conflict *resolution* resource because HR Departments may not have the power or influence to fully resolve a conflict. Other organizational officials are often needed to provide the systemic change needed for a conflict to be fully resolved.

Informal Conflict Management

An organization has the ability to have as many informal conflict management resources as the employees can create. Informal conflict management resources are ones that do not require a written record be kept and are often not escalated to include formal channels such as human resources. As an informal resource, conflict management may not be restricted by the policies and procedures of the organization as much as a formal resource. A couple of examples are outlined below.

Manager mediator. Some groups within an organization prefer to address their conflicts within their own group and not escalate the conflict to formal channels. One way of keeping the conflict informal is for a manager or other third party to intervene and mediate the dispute. This is informal because there is often no record kept of the conflict and Administrative Officers of the organization are not notified of the conflict.

Organizational ombudsmen. An organizational ombudsman is another informal channel that an employee can utilize for conflict management. Rowe (1995), defines an organizational ombudsman as, "a confidential and informal information resource, communications channel, complaint-handler and dispute-resolver, and a person who helps an organization work for change" (p.103). The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) is the largest international association of organizational ombudsmen. The IOA's mandate is to provide Standards of Practice, a Code of Ethics, and provide training in order to "enhance the quality and value of the ombudsman profession" (http://www.ombudsassociation.org/). There are numerous types of ombudsmen; however, I will focus on organizational ombudsmen for the purpose of this project.

The four pillars of the ombudsman office are neutrality and impartiality,

confidentiality, independence, and informality. Neutrality and impartiality refers to the

ombudsman's ethic of remaining unaligned and disconnected from any situation or

relationships that would be perceived as a conflict of interest. The ombudsman keeps all

communication in the strictest of confidence. The ombudsman will not disclose details of

any of the employees that contact the ombudsman office, including whether or not a

person has indeed contacted the office without permission from the employees. The

ombudsman will, when possible, report only to the highest authority within an

organization and be independent from the internal organizational structure. By reporting,

I do not mean that the ombudsman will actually deliver reports to the highest authority,

rather that they will fit into the organizational hierarchy as directly reporting to the

highest authority. Finally, the ombudsman does not keep written records of

communications with any employee that contacts their office. This lack of written record

allows for an informal process. Ombudsman will not participate in any formal legal or

administrative procedure. (http://www.ombudsassociation.org)

Chapter 2: Methods

With the above theoretical background, I explore the unique conflict needs of Alpha Institute[*]. I will assess the current conflict management system of Alpha Institute and the need for an ombudsman office by inquiring about the following: types of conflict present in the organization, how conflict is currently managed, and what additional conflict management resources employees want. I will analyze the results and extract the major causes of conflict at Alpha Institute and match the needs of the organization to the method of conflict management that best fits those needs.

Background of Alpha Institute

Alpha Institute is a department within Bravo University that was created to provide a collaborative scientific environment.

Currently, most Alpha employees are paid by Bravo University and enjoy all of the benefits of Bravo employees. Some employees are paid by other institutions. These employees are "housed" at Alpha and share lab space with other Alpha employees.

Employees at Alpha have access to the Human Resources department of Bravo as well as an "Alpha only" Human Resources department. This dual HR system has the potential to cause conflict which I will discuss later in the paper.

Since the creation of Alpha Institute, the number of employees has skyrocketed from about 100 to nearly 1000. According to the in-house Human Resources website, there are about 100 job requisitions currently open (website visited in April 2008). This rapid growth has created some growing pains within the organization, which I plan to explore.

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[*] Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the anonymity of the institute studied.

Project Goals

The goal of my project is to perform a conflict needs assessment of Alpha Institute regarding the organizational need for an ombudsman office at the institution. I will examine the following research questions: what types of conflict are present in the organization, how is conflict currently managed, what additional conflict management resources would be useful, and would an ombudsman be a useful conflict management tool for Alpha Institute? With the answers to these questions, I will create a presentation for the director of Alpha Institute outlining the need or lack thereof, for an ombudsman office at Alpha Institute.

Methodology

Sample and Procedures

The primary source of data was key informant interviews. Key informant interviews were the only method that was approved by the administration of Alpha Institute. I had originally requested to interview people across the entire Institute, but was restricted to members of Delta and Gamma Departments. I had also planned to conduct an institute-wide survey, but was denied permission to do this. The administration was concerned that employees of the institute would perceive the survey as an official acknowledgement of a problem with the institution. I interviewed members of Delta and Gamma Departments' staff who are responsible for conflict management; for example, lab managers and lab directors. I also interviewed members of the staff who are not at a management level, such as lab technicians. I obtained approval to conduct interviews from the administration of Alpha Institute prior to interviewing participants.

The administration of Alpha Institute required a number of adjustments to the original project, including the restriction of potential participants to two departments of the Institution instead of the entire Institute. Another stipulation for the study was the participants could not use their work time for the interviews. Interviews were required to be conducted either before or after work hours or during lunch breaks. The Institute administration also wanted to ensure that employees understood that I was only conducting a research study and that the results of the study would not result in any action by Alpha Institute administration.

The number of participants was restricted due to time constraints. Approval from Bravo University, Alpha Institute, and University of Massachusetts was required before any participants could be contacted. This process was more time consuming than I had anticipated and thus, I was only able to contact 30 potential participants. Fortunately, I had a relatively high rate of participation with one of three contacted potential participants agreeing to participate.

Participants. I selected participants based on a systematic random sampling of employees of the Delta and Gamma departments within the Alpha Institute to include a mix of levels of authority within the two departments. Participants were selected from a pool of 351 potential participants who were members of either the Delta or Gamma Departments. Thirty participants were randomly selected from the 351 potential participants and emailed an invitation to participate in the study. Ten of the thirty potential participants responded. I notified participants through email and scheduled their interviews via email. Please see Appendix B for the content of the email. Participants participated in an approximately 30 minute interview. The interviews were restricted to

30 minutes by the administration of Alpha Institute so as not to interfere with the job

responsibilities of employees. Many employees were interviewed during their lunch

breaks in empty conference rooms.

Demographics of participants. The sample of ten participants is a sample of the

employees of the two departments (see Table One). Seven of the ten participants are

employees of the Gamma Department and three are employees of the Delta Department.

The Delta Department is smaller than the Gamma Department by about 150 employees.

The participants range in age from 26 to 44 with three of the participants between 26 and

30; three between 31 and 40; and four between 41 and 44.   Seven participants are male

and three are female. The participants are a mix of ethnicities including seven self-

identifying as White/Caucasian, three self-identifying as various non-White ethnicities. I

will not specify the exact ethnicity of these three participants in order to protect their

anonymity. The length of tenure at the institute ranged from two and a half years to nine

years with one participant with less than three years of tenure, four participants with three

to five years of tenure, two participants with five to seven years of tenure, and three

participants with eight or more years at the Institute. I have randomly assigned the

participants numbers and will refer to them by their number and not their names.

Originally, I had planned to interview members of the human resources team, but

was restricted by the administration of Alpha Institute to only lab employees.

Interview

The entire process was kept confidential. Participants' supervisors were not notified

of the participant's participation in the study. Numbers have been assigned to all of the

participants and any identifying information has been excluded.

Some of the questions I address are:

- What are the most common types of conflict [or conflict issues] that arise at Alpha

    Institute?

- How are conflicts currently managed at Alpha Institute?

- What are the needs of the employees at Alpha Institute regarding conflict?

- How are these needs being met?

- What additional conflict management resources are desired?

Please see Appendix C for the full interview guide. I did not define conflict for the

participants. If participants asked what I meant by conflict, I asked the participants how

they defined conflict.

Procedures

Interviews were scheduled via email and were conducted mostly during lunch

hours. The interviews were conducted either in the participant's office, in a conference

room, or in an empty office during the employee's lunch half-hour or outside of work

hours (immediately before or after work). All interviews were audio recorded with a

digital audio recorder with written consent from the participants and then transcribed by

the researcher. Once transcribed, interviews were imported into MaxQDA 2007, a text

analysis software system. Interviews were then coded.

Coding was completed in three rounds. The first round of coding, I read through

the text to search for common macro themes such as sources of conflict, current methods

of addressing conflict, and types of conflict. During the second round of coding, I

labeled specific examples within each of the macro themes. I focused on the

demographic details during the third round and looked for specific examples that I may

have missed during the first two rounds of coding. Please see Appendix D for a list of

codes used to analyze the interviews.

       After all of the text was coded, I retrieved and grouped the text by the following

categories: sources of conflict, types of conflict, outcome of conflict, and methods of

addressing conflict. I then studied each category and analyzed the different subcategories

within each. I then created matrices for each category. For example, I had a matrix that

listed all of the different sources of conflict that included the person who mentioned the

source and how frequently they mentioned it. By tracking how frequently each different

source was mentioned and by which participant, I was able to see patterns within the

different groups of participants. I also created a matrix of just human resources

references made by participants and listed the reasons for using human resources in

conflict management. The final matrix I created was of all of the suggestions that

participants made for additional conflict management resources participants would like to

see added. This matrix provided a very specific account of the different types of

additional resources participants desired.

Chapter 3: Results

The ten participants interviewed provided a broad range of sources of conflict as well as a number of different formal and informal conflict management strategies.

Types of Conflict

The four major types of conflict that were described by the participants were intergroup conflict, intragroup conflict, peer to peer conflict and subordinate and supervisor conflict. The most frequently observed type of conflict was intragroup conflict. Eight of the participants reported observing or being involved in intragroup conflict at Alpha Institute.

Intergroup conflict

 Two levels of intergroup conflict were reported at Alpha Institute: conflict between departments and conflict between distinct groups within a department. Four of the ten participants referred to conflict between Delta and Gamma Departments. Six of the ten participants described the most common intergroup conflict (out of all of the groups within Alpha Institute) as conflict between Delta and Gamma Departments.

Delta/Gamma conflict. Conflict between Delta Department and Gamma Department may be the most reported because the departments work very closely with one another and collaborate on almost all of the projects both departments work on. Contrarily, Participant Ten believes that intergroup conflict is most common between departments that do not work closely together.

An example of conflict between Delta and Gamma Departments is described by Participant Five. Participant Five was in charge of creating a cross department project. This project would involve personnel and other resources from both departments. The conflict began when Participant Five presented the project to the leadership team of both

departments. The leadership team is comprised of all of the directors of the two different

departments as well as the managers of groups within the departments that directly

reported to the directors. Participant Five needed the approval of this leadership team in

order to continue with the project. Participant Five also needed the leadership team to

decide how the resource needs of the project would be fulfilled from each of their

respective departments or groups.

According to Participant Five, one of the biggest challenges in this conflict was

getting a decision from the leadership team regarding his resource allocation request.

Many meetings were held to discuss the different needs of the project and how they could

and would be fulfilled. Part of Participant Five's challenge was coordinating the

schedules of the busy leadership team and scheduling a meeting where all parties were in

attendance.

Intragroup Conflict

Eight of the ten participants described conflict within their own group. These

conflicts took the form of peer to peer conflict and supervisor and subordinate conflict.

Participant One believes that intragroup conflicts are more common because "You

usually don't get many conflicts from people you don't see very often".

Peer to peer. The sources of peer conflict reported were: cultural differences,

lack of respect, role confusion, mistakes, and sick policy. For example, Participant Seven

reports a common conflict within his group is lab technicians not performing to the high

standards set by their protocols and not respecting these protocols. This lack of respect

leads to mistakes, which lead to conflict because other lab technicians must do double

their own work to redo experiments that were done incorrectly. Participant Seven

explains that this creates conflict because lab technicians are not compensated for doing

the extra work and the people who make the mistakes are not reprimanded. According to

Participant Eight, this is also true for people who call in sick very often and abuse the

sick policy. When a lab technician is out sick, his or her peers must do the absent

person's work and are not compensated for the extra duties.

  Subordinate/Supervisor. Four out of the ten participants reported experiencing or

witnessing conflict between a supervisor and his or her subordinate. The sources of this

type of intragroup conflict are: lack of respect for the subordinates, managerial style,

undermining subordinates, and mistakes made in the laboratory.

  For example, Participant Nine described a conflict that he/she had with his/her

supervisor when his/her supervisor undermined his/her authority with Participant Nine's

own subordinates. One of Participant Nine's subordinates was having a problem with

Participant Nine and instead of directly addressing Participant Nine about the issue,

he/she went to Participant Nine's supervisor. Participant Nine's supervisor discovered

that the subordinate was afraid to ask Participant Nine questions about their lab work.

Participant Nine's supervisor decided to move the subordinate to another group instead of

directly addressing the conflict with Participant Nine. Participant Nine felt that his/her

authority over his/her subordinates was undermined by his/her supervisor.

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Sources of Conflict

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  Sources of conflict were grouped into four major groups: personality, lack of

respect, role confusion, and unclear policy. Personality was the source of conflict

reported by the greatest number of participants, being mentioned by eight of the ten

participants. The three next most frequently (five of the ten participants mentioned them)

described sources of conflict are lack of respect, role confusion and unclear policy.

Differing priorities, resources and conflict between the Delta and Gamma Departments

were the second most frequently described sources of conflict with four of the ten

participants reporting them.

Personality

All eight of the participants reporting personality as a source of conflict spoke of

personality conflicts as inevitable and "a way of life", as Participant Two described it.

Differing personalities and personalities that clash are always going to be present.

Participant Three explains personality conflict as inevitable because "you can't change

personalities".

Participant Three describes a conflict between his former supervisor and himself

that was rooted in personality differences. Participant Three did not agree with the

management style of his supervisor. In one extreme case, Participant Three recalls

comments made by the supervisor to the entire group, "I can think of one instance he just

said 'I don't care about people in the group'". Participant Three attributed this comment

to the personality of his supervisor.

Participant Two also describes conflict management styles as an attribute of a

person's personality: "…if Person B did this and escalated the conflict. Person B is not a

bad person, but maybe he has another personality that they don't like to say or confront

conflict"

Lack of Respect

Lack of respect at Alpha Institute was described in many forms: lack of respect

from a peer, lack of respect from a supervisor, and lack of respect from a subordinate.

Participants One and Two describe lack of respect among peers as a source of conflict. Participant Two describes a conflict where she was asked by her supervisor to train a peer on a new procedure. Participant Two attempted to schedule the training and was ignored or given excuses for not attending the training. Participant Two felt disrespected by her peer because their supervisor had mandated the training and the peer had ignored the mandate.

Role Confusion

Role confusion occurs at Alpha Institute when roles are unclearly defined and cause conflict because employees have different expectations of people in different roles that may not be universally accepted expectations.

Half of the participants reported that unclear roles are a source of conflict. For example, Participant Four reported that many conflicts that he has are due to him not knowing exactly what his role is within his group. He walks into the laboratory every day not knowing what he will do that day. His work depends upon the other members of the group. This can cause conflict within his group if Participant Four does not know what project to work on: "Sometimes a project needs to be done and I know what needs to be done and sometimes only they know what needs to be done. I don't own my own project."

Another example of role confusion is described by Participant Nine. Participant Nine, who left one department for another, says that a conflict occurred when he/she tried to coordinate a project across departments. Participant Nine was instructed by his/her boss to coordinate a project with another group in a different department. When Participant Nine contacted the other group, he/she was met with indignation. The other

group did not believe that Participant Nine had the authority to request their resources for

a joint project. The manager of the group insisted that all communication be directed

through him/her. Participant Nine believes that this conflict could have been avoided if

his/her boss had communicated his/her role to the manager of the other group.

Unclear Policy

Participants reported unclear or unequally enforced policy as a source of conflict.

Two examples of such policies that participants reported were the sick-day policy and the

visitor policy.

Participants Eight and Seven described the sick day policy as being unequally

enforced. They both believe that some members in their respective groups take

advantage of the honor system policy. This causes conflict when other members of the

group must "pick up the slack" from the sick person's absence, as Participant Seven

describes it. In the laboratory experiments must be run regardless of whether or not a

person is absent. Often, the responsibility falls to other members of the group if a person

is absent.

Visitor policy. Participant Three describes a conflict that revolved around the lack

of policy for visitors to the institute. He had scheduled visitors for a tour and information

sessions with different groups and departments and was then told by the director of the

department that the visitors were "unauthorized". Participant Three did not have a policy

to refer to what type of visitor was authorized and what type was not. According to

Participant Three, this lack of policy created a conflict.

The above are only two examples of how policy is enforced and created. Lack of

policy also creates conflict at Alpha Institute, as Participant Three points out.

Priorities

Differing priorities were discussed mostly in the context of conflict between Delta and Gamma Departments where the different departments have conflicting priorities. For example, Participants Five and Six describe the differences between the priorities of Gamma Department and Delta Department. Both participants point to the different priorities of projects. One Department will believe that a specific project should be high on the "to do" list while another department believes that their project is more of a priority. Due to the structure of the two departments, only one project can be worked on at a time. This creates many of the conflicts between Delta and Gamma Departments according to Participants Five and Six.

The other context in which priorities were discussed was differing priorities between peers in the same group. Participant Two described conflict between her and her younger peers caused by their differing priorities. Participant Two's main priority for working hard at the institute is supporting her family. She describes many of her peers' priorities for working at the institute as a "stepping stone for a better job". Participant Two believes these differing priorities cause conflict.

Changing priorities can also cause conflict. Participant Eight reports this as a cause of conflict because the priorities of different projects are not necessarily reported to the lower ranks in the hierarchy. Much of the decision-making for priorities is made by the directors of the different departments and the employees running the lab machines are not always informed when priorities change. Participant Eight believes this causes conflict because not everyone is given the same message of a project's priority. Also, both Participant Eight and Participant Seven describe ownership that many lab employees

feel over their projects. This ownership can cause conflict when a project is deemed less of a priority than another person's project.

Participant Six, who is responsible for allocating different resources and prioritizing projects, also reports priorities as a source of conflict. According to Participant Six, every director or manager of a project believes that his or her project is the most important and should be the highest priority. A protocol and set of criteria have been established to prioritize projects as objectively as possible. Even with this protocol, Participant Six still receives complaints and experiences conflict regarding project prioritization.

Resources

Resource scarcity, control of resources and use of resources are a source of conflict that is reported by four of the ten participants. Participant Five describes conflict over resources as one of the most prevalent conflicts he has encountered at Alpha Institute. He thinks this is due to the small number of people who control a large amount of resources. Participant Five believes that this causes conflict because it is difficult to get the small group of people to allocate resources to new projects. He believes that resources, especially ones that are shared between Delta and Gamma Departments, are challenging to allocate because of the vast amount of resources needed by each department.

Participant Six reports that resource conflict can arise from project managers having unrealistic expectations of the resources. For example, a project manager might want a project completed faster than is physically possible for the resources.

Another conflict regarding resources is the expensive nature of many of the materials that are used. Participants Seven and Eight both describe conflicts where mistakes were made with very expensive materials. Participant Eight was involved in a conflict where a lab technician made a mistake and was "chastised" by her supervisor in front of the entire group and "bopped on the head" by the supervisor. The supervisor was very upset that the lab technician had made a very costly mistake. Participant Eight described the behavior of the supervisor as uncharacteristic of the lab culture. He admits that mistakes do occur, but that mistakes are used as learning tools, not punished. The source of this particular conflict was not only resources, but also a lack of cultural understanding by the supervisor, who is new to the institute and its culture of learning. This conflict described by Participant Eight also falls under the role confusion section of sources of conflict. Because the supervisor is new to the organization, s/he has not fully been trained or realized her/his role as teacher within the organization. Participant Eight describes supervisors as teachers in the lab.

The final issue reported by three of the participants regarding resources is physical space conflicts. Like many similar institutes, Alpha Institute is growing rapidly. This provides a source of conflict because each employee requires a certain amount of space. At this point, space is a finite resource and can only be divided so many times.

Other Sources

Participants also reported promotions and salaries as sources of conflict that do not fit in the categories of intergroup or intragroup conflict.

Promotions. Four of the ten participants reported promotions or job titles as a source of conflict. Participant one reports that promotions are a main source of conflict

he experiences as a manager. The conflict will often stem from one employee who has

been at the institute longer than another employee, but the employee with the shorter

tenure will get promoted and not the more experienced employee. Participant One does

not treat these types of conflict very seriously because he believes that these types of

conflict are prevalent in every group.

Participant Nine describes his/her personal frustrating experience with job titles

and promotions with her former boss:

> "…nope he would not give me any type of… at that time, I was managing four people. Before I left, I had five people but he would not give me any title that had to do with managing of anything or.... applications manager. Nothing. Nothing. Just he would not. That was extremely frustrating too".

Peers of Participant Nine within the same group, who also supervised employees, had

titles that reflected their supervisorory responsibilities and role.

Management of conflict

Participants at Alpha Institute reported both formal and informal types of conflict

management. The most frequently reported formal conflict management approach was

bringing the conflict to Human Resources and/or bringing the conflict to the next higher

person on the organizational hierarchy. The most frequent informal conflict management

strategies reported were addressing the conflict directly with the parties and avoiding the

conflict entirely. A third type of conflict management that was reported was leaving the

group or the Institute entirely.   All ten participants reported dissatisfaction with the

current conflict management approaches.

Formal

Two methods of formal conflict management were reported by participants: bringing the conflict to Human Resources and reporting the conflict to the next level higher on the organizational hierarchy.

Human Resources. All ten participants reported bringing a conflict to Human Resources as an option for conflict management. The most common reason to visit Human Resources was a conflict with a supervisor or discomfort in addressing intragroup conflict with a supervisor. However, six of the ten participants expressed apprehension in actually going to Human Resources. Some of the causes of apprehension were the belief that Human Resources is powerless, will take the manager's side, will not keep your conflict confidential, and is not trustworthy.

Many of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current Human Resources department as well as the extremes that employees will go to in order to avoid bringing a conflict to Human Resources, such as leaving a department or Alpha Institute.

Participant Three described his reason for leaving his previous group:

> Participant 3: HR is seen as being increasingly powerless so a lot of people don't go there.

> Interviewer: So with HR being powerless, what impact do you think that that has?

> Participant 3: Yes people do not go to HR. They deal with problems on their own or they leave. There are only one or two resolutions they either leave that situation… I mean if your boss does not do anything about it you have to leave or suck it up for a while and don't say anything or leave.

Participant Five reported that members of his group had contemplated bringing their conflict to Bravo University's Human Resources office instead of Alpha Institute's

Human Resources office because he believes that Bravo University's Human Resources

is better equipped to handle conflict:

> "I could tell you that within our group…we don't see HR as a viable option because HR has ignored our problems for many years. And we've also seen HR say things to managers and other people that we didn't think was appropriate to be said since you are going to them supposedly in a confidential fashion. So quite frankly nobody sees HR as a viable option within our group. To be totally honest, there has been discussions that you could take it to [Bravo's] HR office because we are technically [Bravo] and they are HR. I don't know if anybody's done that and I don't know if I would do that…because I'm not sure…again that's a funny relationship and I feel like taking it to [Bravo's] HR before you take it to your own could cause a serious rift with your managers and you because it's not a proper trajectory by what do you do when you don't trust your own HR?"

Participants reported a mixture of reasons for using Human Resources to manage

conflict. Four of the participants believed that Human Resources should mainly be used

to manage "serious" conflict such as physical conflict, harassment or discrimination

issues. Six of the participants believed that Human Resources could help manage conflict

that involved repairing a relationship. Six of the participants reported that they hesitate to

use Human Resources for fear that Human Resources would not keep their conflicts

confidential. Participant One described their experience as a new employee and how they

were instructed that a particular Human Resources representative was "notorious for

blabbing personal information and stuff about peoples' business".

Hierarchy. Nine of the ten participants reported that their supervisor was the first

resource for conflict management. When a conflict included the participant's boss,

Human Resources or avoiding the conflict were the most frequently preferred conflict

management strategies.

Another frequent option was to bring a conflict to the supervisor's manager, or the next highest person outside the group on the organizational hierarchy. Participant Five describes one person in conflict who brought their conflict all the way up the chain of command to the Director of Alpha Institute: "One person took it directly to [the director]. I don't think that was such a smart move. That person has since left [Alpha]."

Informal

The ten participants reported a combination of the extremes along the conflict management spectrum ranging from direct confrontation to completely avoiding conflict.

Direct confrontation. Seven of the ten participants reported attempting to resolve the conflict directly with the person or persons involved in the conflict. Participant Four describes his group as very open with high communication. If a mistake is made, the group members work together to resolve it. Participant Four's group is in the minority with their skilled communication. Participants described attempting to resolve conflict through direct confrontation with little success. For example, Participant Three describes an example where people in his former group attempted to confront their supervisor with whom they all had a conflict: "Some people completely confronted him and ended up getting fired for it."

Avoidance. Six of the ten participants reported either avoiding conflict or keeping a conflict to themselves. Two of the six subjects mentioned that their jobs are very important for the families so they do not want to risk conflict with a manager and thus risk their job. Both feared retribution from conflict.

Participant Three saw the severe negative consequences for his peer that confronted a conflict and then chose to leave the group, thus avoiding the conflict. From

this data, it appears that some employees who confront conflict directly are severely

punished. Participants who have observed these negative consequences for direct

confrontation have avoided these negative consequences by avoiding conflict.

Exiting Group or Institute. Another method of managing conflict that was

described by three of the ten participants was leaving the group, department or institute.

This course of action was a last resort after other methods of formal and informal conflict

management strategies were attempted and unsuccessful. Two of the participants

interviewed had actually left a group or department due to a conflict with their supervisor

that they were unable to resolve to their satisfaction.

Participant Three left his group after attempting to manage a conflict with his

supervisor through numerous channels. Participant Three consulted with other group

members on how to manage the conflict, he also approached Human Resources. Human

Resources brought the conflict to the supervisor's supervisor who declined to take action.

Some members of the group confronted their supervisor directly about a conflict and

were subsequently fired. Other members of the group, including Participant Three

decided to leave the group and move to another group within the institute rather than

address the conflict and risk losing their jobs.

Participant Nine also left his/her group when conflict with his/her supervisor was

unmanageable. Participant Nine attempted to confront his/her supervisor directly, sought

advice from Human Resources, and approached the director of the department (the

supervisor's boss). When all of these informal and formal channels failed to produce a

satisfactory result, Participant Nine felt that his/her only option left was to leave the

department entirely. Instead of the conflict being managed in a productive manner,

Participant Nine was forced to avoid the conflict by leaving the group.

Additional Conflict Management Resources

In addition to expressing dissatisfaction with the current methods available for

managing conflict, every participant reported at least one additional conflict management

resource he or she would like to see added to Alpha Institute. The most common

additional conflict management resource requested was training of some form. The two

second most common additional conflict management resource was an ombudsman or

other form of a neutral third party separate from Human Resources.

Training

Seven of the ten participants reported they would like to see additional training in

either conflict management or general management training for supervisors and

managers.

Conflict management training. Two of the participants reported attending conflict

management training that was offered by Human Resources and one of the participants

had conflict management training from a previous employer. The two participants that

attended the conflict management training offered by Human Resources were dissatisfied

with the quality of the training. Participants expressed an interest in additional training in

conflict management in order to resolve conflict on their own.

Management training. Seven of the ten participants suggested training for

supervisors and managers because no official management training is offered to

employees who manage other employees. The participants who requested this training

were all managers or supervisors with a background in science and no management

training.

Participant Eight reports that a common practice in the field is that lab employees

are promoted to supervisory and management positions after an unspoken length of

tenure in the lab. Participant Eight also reports that these newly promoted supervisors are

not provided with any management training.

Third Party

Four of the participants actually expressed a desire to have a neutral third party

present to help facilitate a dialogue or help manage a conflict. Participant Ten describes a

neutral third party in contrast to the formality of Human Resources:

> "I can imagine it being helpful to have another resource to turn to. And
> that's never been something I've used our human resources department
> for…they seem pretty stretched and I don't really know. I would not have
> any inclination necessarily because people in HR…sending people to HR,
> it's like you're in trouble, as opposed to a neutral third party, but I don't
> know what's going on with you guys, but you need to go work it out
> somewhere."

Participant Nine actually wanted a mediator to help resolve a conflict that had been

recurring over a long period of time, Participant Nine did not think that it would be an

option:

> Participant Nine:…And I also think I tried to approach HR kind of hoping
> to get a mediator or something, but that never really seemed to be an
> option…

> Interviewer: So did you want a mediation?

> Participant Nine: I didn't quite ask for it. I was hoping that maybe they
> would bring it up. Yeah, sometimes it's easier when you have another
> person present to just kind of hash things out but that was close to an
> employee evaluation, so I wrote my complaints or how I felt on my
> evaluation.

Four participants also expressly requested an ombudsman in addition to suggesting third party neutrals as part of the conflict management system. These four participants were not the exact same four that requested a general third party neutral. When asked what he would like to see added, Participant Five responded:

> For resolving conflicts? There's lots of things that I like to see added. Two things that come to mind immediately: I think we very much need an open office or some ombudsman type of venue. I would always think that should, you know, have been HR, but I think they've proven that that's not their role even if it's supposed to be. So I do think something like that could easily be found as useful as long as that office or group is actually respected and responded to and suggestions that they make were actually carried through. Otherwise, I just see it as another airing point.

Chapter 4: Discussion and General Recommendations

The needs assessment conducted at Alpha Institute provided insight into the most common types and sources of conflict, methods for managing conflict, the dissatisfaction participants had with the current conflict management methods.

The most common sources of conflict reported were intergroup conflict, intragroup conflict, peer conflict and supervisor/subordinate conflict.

Needs of Alpha Institute

Based on the results of the needs assessment of Alpha Institute, the following was discovered: employees who attempt to manage conflict directly report they are severely reprimanded, conflict is often managed unproductively, management training is insufficient, there is no confidential resource for conflict management, conflict management training for employees is unsatisfactory, roles are often not clearly defined, priorities for different projects are not transparent and some policies are either lacking or unclear.

Address Conflict and Not Avoid Conflict

The underlying cause of avoiding conflict is rooted in the lack of conflict management resources available to employees. Based on the data, employees who have previously experienced conflict and attempted to manage the conflict through either their manager (who is not formally trained) or Human Resources (who is not trusted) have not had a satisfactory outcome of the conflict. This dissatisfaction has resulted in employees avoiding conflict because they have no resources to manage the conflict as is evident in the data.

Avoiding conflict was a frequently reported practice among employees of Alpha Institute and is encouraged by managers who would rather move a person in conflict to

another group than address the conflict as was evident in Participant Nine's account.

Participant Nine's manager moved an employee in conflict from one group to another

within his/her department instead of addressing the conflict. Avoiding conflict is not a

constructive method of managing conflict because the conflict simply moves from group

to group without being resolved. The case of Participant Nine fits with Kolb's and

Donnellon's belief that when organizational conflict is not fully resolved, it resurfaces in

other forms within the organization. Moving the employee in conflict to a different

group exacerbates this movement of conflict within the organization.

The consequences of avoiding conflict are reported to be poor employee morale,

high turnover rate, and loss of money to hire and train new employees (Constantino and

Merchant, 1996). In this small sample, there were indications that this dynamic may be

playing out at Alpha. Poor employee morale was reported by Participant Three. Both

Participant Three and Participant Five reported employees leaving Alpha Institute

because of conflict. A high turnover rate of employees costs the Institute money to hire a

new person and time to train them. Turnover can also negatively affect production rates

(Ury, Brett, Goldberg, 1993). Because I was denied access to employee records, I do not

have specific data about turnover rate beyond the reports of the participants in this study.

Management Training

The first resource for conflict management that most employees reported was

their immediate supervisor. The supervisors interviewed admitted that they did not have

formal conflict management training, yet their employees come to them as a resource for

conflict management. The employees of Alpha Institute are seeking conflict management

advice from supervisors who are not formally trained in conflict management, nor are they trained in successful employee management.

Four of the participants reported that they would like additional management training because many of the scientists who manage staff have no formal training in staff management. While there is a management coach for the directors of the major departments in Alpha Institute, there is no formal or informal management training for anyone below the director level. Participant Ten, reports that he or she does not actually manage many of the personality conflicts that occur because lower-level supervisors are expected to address the conflict themselves. If the supervisors who are expected to address conflict do not have formal management training, how are they expected to transition from the role of scientist to supervisor or manager without any training? This lack of training needs to be addressed. All supervisors and managers should receive formal training on management skills. These trainings should include conflict management.

Confidential Resource

Many of the participants reported using Human Resources as a method of managing conflict. However, many participants also reported a lack of confidence in the Human Resources Department. This lack of confidence stems from a belief that HR does not have the power to actually make institutional changes needed to manage conflict better. Three participants also described their lack of trust in the ability of HR to keep their conflicts confidential. If employees do not feel comfortable with their main source of conflict management, conflicts may go unaddressed. Instead, people may avoid the conflict and may leave a group. Participant Nine, who moved groups after attempting to

manage conflict, had the conflict follow her to her new group. This fits with Kolb and

Donellan's belief that when conflict in an organization does not get fully resolved, it just

resurfaces in a new fashion.

At this point in the development of Alpha Institute, earning the trust of employees

may be difficult. Employees have made this lack of confidence in Human Resources'

ability to keep employee issues confidential a part of the culture. As described above by

Participant One, new employees are told not to trust Human Resources because they

gossip about employees. This reinforces the lack of trust in Human Resources.

Conflict Training

Half of the participants reported a desire to receive formal conflict management

training. Seven of the participants reported attempting to address the person they were in

conflict with directly before using outside resources such as a supervisor or HR. If

employees prefer to address conflict directly and they do not have the resources or

training to successfully manage conflict, then conflicts may not be successfully managed

at Alpha Institute. Training in conflict management could address this need. Two of the

participants reported attending training in conflict management provided by Human

Resources, but the participants were not satisfied with the quality of the training. Highly

qualified trainers are needed to provide the appropriate conflict management resources

needed to address the specific types of conflict experienced by Alpha Institute

employees.

Eight of the participants reported personality as a source of conflict. A training

on how different people approach and manage conflict would be a useful resource for

Alpha Institute employees. While personalities are not changeable, the perception that

employees have of each other are. An exercise in perspective taking may help the employees to see the other person's view of the conflict. This may also address the different cultural aspects that were reported as the cause of some intragroup conflict.

Clearly Defined Roles

As stated above, role confusion can cause conflict. Half of the participants reported that role confusion was a source of conflict. In order to address this source of conflict, clear roles must be defined. When new employees join a team, their role in the team should be clearly defined by their manager and reaffirmed by the team. Also, the roles of other members on the team must be clearly defined to new employees. Some of the role confusion arose during intergroup conflict. This type of conflict can be prevented when new projects are introduced across group lines. Roles for a project should be outlined from the very beginning of the project so that each person involved knows not only their own role, but what everyone else's role is.

Transparent Priorities

Participants reported unclear priorities or conflicting priorities as a cause of conflict. If at all possible, managers should make the priorities of the group well known throughout the group and update the group on changing priorities. This is especially crucial when new projects enter a group. Employees should be notified of the priority status of a project when it enters the group.

Clear Policies

A lack of policy or unclear policy was reported as a cause of conflict by half of the participants. As a newer institute, the Alpha Institute is constantly developing new policies. These policies must be written in clear language and must be accessible to all

employees. Many of the conflicts reported regarding policy were caused by an employee

not realizing they were acting against policy. If policies were more accessible, these

conflicts could be prevented.

A system to review current policies as well as define new policies could be

implemented to address future policy conflicts. A policy system will provide a much-

needed channel for managing current and future policy conflicts.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Recommendations for an Ombudsman

Based on the needs assessment conducted at Alpha Institute and reported here, I have concluded that additional conflict management resources should be added in order to better meet the conflict management needs of Alpha Institute. Through their examples and suggestions, participants expressed a need for a confidential and informal resource in addition to the current formal conflict management resources in place. Further research, including a survey of the entire institute as well as more key interviews with employees from across all of the departments, would also be helpful in further defining the nature of the need, and shaping an ombudsman program.

Ombudsman Office

The results showed that Alpha Institute is in need of more productive methods of managing conflict, more management training, a confidential conflict management resource, conflict management training, clearly defined roles, transparent priorities and a system to evaluate and create clear policies.

An ombudsman office can help meet the needs of Alpha Institute. An ombudsman office can address the above needs by providing an informal, confidential, neutral, and independent resource for the employees. There are no other organizational offices that can provide all four of these elements for conflict management. Alpha Institute needs all four of these elements to improve their conflict management.

Productive Conflict Management

An ombudsman is an expert in conflict management and can provide a productive conflict management channel where conflict is not avoided, but safely addressed without the fear of repercussions.

Track Trends. An ombudsman office will track trends in conflict and will be able to evaluate groups with reported conflicts. Conflict may no longer be moved from group to group and avoided by employees moving groups, instead conflict can be addressed.

Independent. The ombudsman will be independent of the hierarchical structure of Alpha Institute and will not be influenced by the administrative structure. In a university setting, the ombudsman sits directly below or to the side of the highest level on the organizational chart. Thus, the ombudsman will be a neutral resource for employees. The ombudsman will be able to fill the gap of a confidential and neutral resource that has been left by the distrust of the Human Resources department. The ombudsman office will have the resources and skills to provide mediation should an employee seek a neutral third party. Three of the participants would have liked mediation specifically to help resolve their conflicts, but they were not offered mediation as an option.

The ombudsman office will be able to provide an informal channel for employees who are not comfortable speaking with their supervisor either because the conflict is with their supervisor, or because they fear retribution from making a formal complaint to the supervisor. The ombudsman will be able to generate options with the employee on the resources available to manage the conflict.

Management Training

An ombudsman can provide training for effective management skills as well as provide a resource for managers in how to handle conflicts within their groups. Ombudsmen are trained to mentor managers and provide options and suggestions for how to manage conflict.

Confidential Resource

An ombudsman office will address conflict and help employees to manage and not avoid conflict by providing a resource for conflict management that the Human Resources department cannot provide. An ombudsman office will provide a confidential resource where employees can seek advice for how to manage conflicts without the fear of retribution.

Conflict Management Training

The ombudsman office will also have the ability to train employees in conflict management so that employees can address their conflicts directly, which is what eighty percent of the participants reported they preferred.

Clearly Defined Roles

As a conflict management expert, an ombudsman can provide training for groups and individuals on communication skills. Enhanced communication skills may help with some role conflicts. For example, an ombudsman can facilitate a "best practices" discussion between two groups when they must collaborate on a project. These "best practices" could include a discussion on who will be the contact person in each group for the project, how information will be communicated and how needs will be addressed as they arise. As a neutral party, the ombudsman can facilitate these types of discussions to improve intergroup interaction.

Transparent Priorities

An ombudsman can provide an independent view of conflicts involving priorities and can provide communication training for groups to help establish transparent priorities for all projects entering the laboratory queue.

Policy System

An organizational ombudsman is an expert in policy. If an employee is unsure of a particular policy, he or she can visit the ombudsman for clarification of a policy. By clarifying policy, conflict regarding policy and unclear policy can be managed more effectively. An ombudsman can also suggest to administration where conflicts have occurred due to a lack of policy. Thus, a new policy can be established to prevent future policy conflicts. The ombudsman can also help establish systems for creating and reviewing policy.

Conclusion

By implementing the above recommendations of providing productive conflict management resources, more management training, a confidential resource for employees, conflict management training for all employees, providing clearly defined roles and developing a policy creation/review system, Alpha institute can address the conflict management needs of their employees. An ombudsman office can best meet all of these needs by providing an informal, confidential, neutral, and independent resource for the employees. There are no other organizational offices that can provide all four of these elements for conflict management. Alpha Institute needs all four of these elements to improve their conflict management.

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Table One
Demographic Statistics

Age range	Number of participants
Age 20-29	3
Age 30-39	3
Age 40-49	4

Gender

Gender	
Male	7
Female	3

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	7
Non-White	3

Title

Title	
Manager/Director	2
Supervisor/Coordinator	2
Research Scientist	3
Project Specialist	1
Research Technician	1
Lab Assistant	1

Tenure

Tenure	
Less than 3 years	1
3-5 years	4
5-7 years	2
8 or more years	3

Group

Group	
Gamma	3
Delta	7

Appendix A
CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

Would an ombudsman be a useful conflict resolution tool for an academic/scientific institute?

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lisa Chuda Witzler from the Alpha Institute of Bravo University* and current masters student at University of Massachusetts, Boston (UMASS Boston). The purpose of the study is to perform a needs assessment of the Alpha Institute regarding the organizational need for an ombuds office at the institution. Using the insights I gain from the needs assessment, I will design a proposal for an ombuds program at the institute. An ombudsman provides advice for channels available for conflict resolution as well as providing resources for systemic change. An ombuds office provides a confidential, informal, neutral and independent resource to the members of the community they serve. The results of this study will be included in Lisa Chuda Witzler's Masters Project, however identifying names and details will not be disclosed in the paper. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of a random selection of Alpha employees. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

• This interview is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time or for any reason. We expect that the interview will take about 30 minutes.

• You will not be compensated for this interview.

• The information you tell us will be confidential.

• We would like to record this interview on audio cassette so that we can use it for reference while proceeding with this study. We will not record this interview without your permission. If you do grant permission for this conversation to be recorded on cassette, you have the right to revoke recording permission and/or end the interview at any time.

This project will be completed by August 30, 2008 All interview recordings will be stored in a secure work space until June 30, 2009. The tapes will then be destroyed.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

(*Please check all that apply*)

[] I give permission for this interview to be recorded on audio cassette.

Name of Subject _____

Signature of Subject _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____Date _____

Please contact Lisa Chuda Witzler with any questions or concerns.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Eben Weitzman, at (617) 287-7238. You may also contact Michelle Auerbach at (617)287-5370 of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, UMASS Boston, Administration Building, 2nd Floor, 100 Morrissey Blvd, Boston, MA 02125.

* I have removed any identifying contact information to protect the confidential nature of this project.

Appendix B
Email to Schedule Subject Interviews

Dear Alpha Employee:

I'm Lisa Chuda Witzler, a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. For my master's project I have chosen to perform a needs assessment of the organizational need for an ombuds' office at the Alpha Institute, as well as the development of an ombudsman program.

The role of an ombudsman is to provide advice for channels available for conflict resolution, as well as providing resources for systemic change. An ombuds' office provides a confidential, informal, neutral and independent resource to the members of the community it serves.

The results of this study will be included in my masters project. However, no identifying names or details will be disclosed in the paper.

You are being contacted because you have been randomly selected from a pool of Alpha employees as a possible participant in this study. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

Please note the following:

  * This interview is voluntary. You have the right to decline to be
    interviewed. If you agree to be interviewed, you have the right
    not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time
    or for any reason. I expect that the interview will take about 30
    minutes.

  * You will not be compensated for this interview, and the interview
    will take place during lunch or other non-work/ non-paid hours.

  * This research is for the sole purpose of completing my Master's
    project for my MA in Dispute Resolution. This is not a research project sponsored by
    the Alpha Institute.

  * The information you tell me will be confidential.

  * I would like to record this interview on audio cassette so that I
    can use it for reference while proceeding with this study. I will
    not record this interview without your permission. If you do grant
    permission for this conversation to be recorded on cassette, you
    have the right to revoke recording permission and/or end the
    interview at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please respond to Lisa Chuda Witzler at to schedule an interview time and location at your earliest convenience.

Appendix C

Interview Questions:

1. What are the most common conflicts that you have seen during your time at Alpha?

2. Please describe a conflict that you have experienced or witnessed as an employee of the Alpha Institute.
    a. What was your role in the conflict?
    b. Was the conflict resolved?
    c. If so, how?
    d. How do you feel about the outcome? Were you satisfied with the result? How so?

3. In general, when an employee has a conflict, what options and resources do they have?
    a. Are there any resources you would like to see added?

    b. Do you know how these conflicts have been addressed?

4. Demographic Information:
    a. Age
    b. Gender
    c. Ethnic Background
    d. Position at Alpha Institute
    e. Length of Tenure at Alpha Institute

Appendix D

Code System
    decision making
    additional resources
        deeper management structure
        ombudsman
        training
        management training
        neutral third party
    demographics
        age
        gender
        Job title
        ethnicity
        Tenure length
    time
    source of conflict
        discrimination
        personality
        poor morale
        unfair treatment
        cultural differences
        pressure to perform
        intimidation
        salary
        management style
        repeat offender
        priorities
        lab culture
            new to group
        physical conflict
        program/platform conflict
        lack of policy
        unclear policy
        resources
        supervisor/subordinate
        lack of respect
        role confusion
        lack of coordination
        lack of decision-making
        gender
        sick policy
        employee reviews
        promotions

communication
　　　lack of
　　　needs
space issues
mistake
outcome of conflict
　　increase sensitivity
　　fire staff
　　inaction
　　slow to change structure
　　get resources
　　create priority
　　policy
　　record of conflict
　　increase communication
　　increased confidence
frustration
Conflict management
　　general meetings
　　foster community
　　union
　　leave Broad
　　increase communication/meetings
　　colleague
　　pick your battles
　　suck it up
　　wrong people in conversation
　　up hierarchy
　　define roles
　　consult others
　　keep w/i group
　　behavior modification
　　go around person
　　mediation
　　keep to self
　　leave group
　　　　conflict follows
　　avoidance
　　direct to person
　　Above supervisor
　　Supervisor
　　　　advice from supervisor
　　HR
　　　　uses: coaching
　　　　ombuds needs buy-in from HR
　　　　uses: poor working environment

      hesitate using
      uses: large issues
      uses: repeat offender
      Bravo HR
      result: not confidential
      result: ignore problem
      result: takes manager side
      resources: outside trainers
      result: prevent lawsuit
      uses: discrimination
      result: leave group
      result: HR is powerless
      uses: can't use boss
      result: inaction
      uses: advice to managers
      uses: protect rights
      uses: clarify policy
      uses: cultural differences
      uses: investigate case
      uses: judge case
      uses: fire
      uses: relationship
      resources: training
      uses harassment
      try and relate
Inter group conflict
Intra group conflict