

Managing workplace conflict and dispute resolution processes

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What are your aims in resolving workplace conflict?

- To make it go away?
- To keep it in-house?
- To keep costs down?
- To create an appropriate organisational culture?



All the above?

Justice theories and their principles

- Procedural justice (steps taken to resolve)
- Distributive justice (fairness of outcome)
- Interactional justice (being treated with dignity and respect)

These are complicated by internal dynamics of interests, rights and power

Interests:

the desires and concerns which motivate people to bargain or fight for what they want

Rights:

predetermined standards such as entitlements, rules and laws

Power:

the ability to coerce, convince, threaten and take action to obtain one's target.

Case: The Caney Mine Dispute

At Caney Mine, workers store their boots in trays on shelves at the entrance to the bathhouse. Miners cannot report for work without their boots.

Joe finds his boots are missing. This is common for miners due to a combination of theft and pranks.

Joe reports the matter to the supervisor who tells Joe that he will not be allowed to sign on for duty.

Joe is very angry about losing a day's pay and quickly gains support from his fellow workers by calling a snap strike.

The company loses a day's production.

**What are the points of conflict escalation here?
What are the costs involved in this conflict?**

Organisational processes which assist conflict resolution

- A workable grievance procedure which does not contain too many steps;
- Trained supervisors and managers who are skilled enough to deal with the dispute or refer it to HR;
- Employees willing and motivated to use the formal grievance procedure instead of resorting to other means of resolution;
- HR evaluation of the internal dispute resolution system measured by:

1. Transaction Costs

These are the dollar amounts incurred through salaries, delays, tribunal/court expenses.

2. Satisfaction with Outcomes

A measure of how much the resolution fulfilled the interests that began the conflict

3. Effect on relationships

A measure of how well the resolution leaves the relationship intact

4. Recurrence

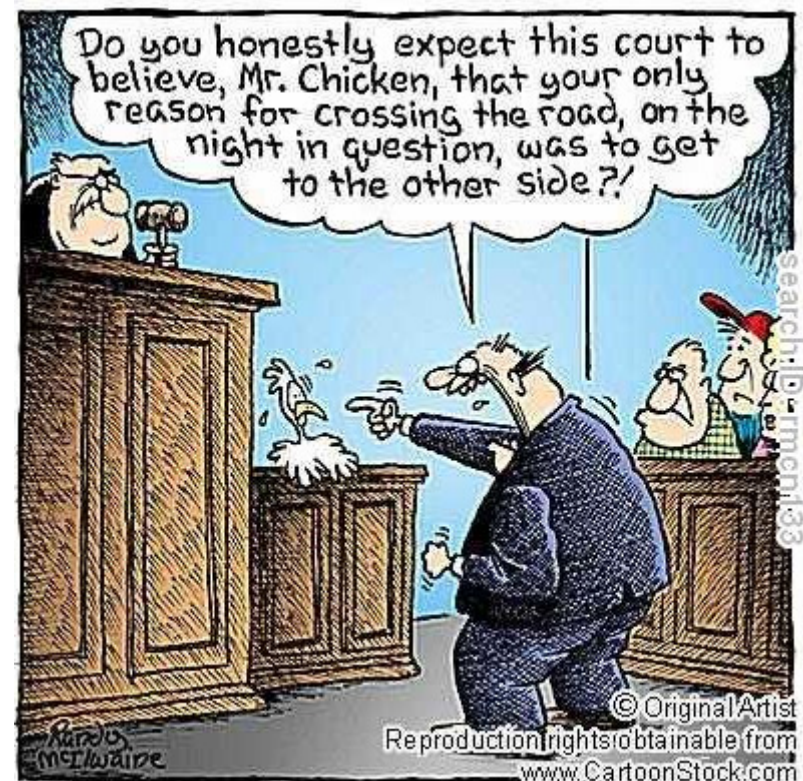
A measure of the chance of the dispute occurring again

5. Justice

A measure of how well the resolution satisfied the elements of justice

Procedural Justice

- Focuses on the fairness of the dispute system process
- This has resulted in set of rules often referred to as the 'rule of law':
 1. Charge is relayed to the accused in writing with detail
 2. Accused has an opportunity to defend him/her self
 3. Decision maker is neutral
 4. Decision maker provides reasons for decision



Distributive Justice

- Focuses on the fairness of the distribution of a scarce resource
- We judge the fairness of distributions according to:
 - Equality (all get the same)
 - Equity (more goes to the greatest contributor)
 - Need (more goes to the needy)



"Jerkins and I worked it out. He can have the office with the window."

Interactional Justice

- Focuses on the fairness of treatment within the dispute system
- People who have been treated with respect and dignity tend to accept the outcome of the dispute even if it is not to their advantage



The impact of justice on dispute outcomes

- Procedural justice is a powerful predictor of acceptance of the outcome
- Importantly interactional justice together with procedural justice predict acceptance of the outcome regardless of the type whether the outcome is favourable or not.
- Disputants who receive procedural and interactional justice are more likely to blame themselves for a poor decision.
- Disputants denied procedural and interactional justice will not accept the outcome if it is unfavourable and will distrust their managers whether the outcome is good or bad.

Case study: Max

Supervisor's report:

I am the Manager of the Survey Team. We conduct and analyse all the market and feasibility surveys for the organisation. It's a small team and we certainly depend on the good will and hard work from our team members. Three months ago, I was offered the services of a surplus employee, Max, who had worked for 28 years in the trades area as a manager. He had good general office skills, some research and certainly, marketing skills. I was keen to expand the team and was very happy to take on Max.

Shortly after joining the team, Max developed a very antagonistic attitude towards me as his manager. I don't know whether he has a problem with working with a woman. I have counselled him, but he remained sullen and refused to really talk. He has stirred up a lot of trouble in the team, and I think he's spread a great deal of discontent. He is also unreliable and he is often away ill. He is simply not working out, and my advice from senior management is that I cannot dismiss him.

Max's response

After 28 years with the trades section my whole career was destroyed by an arbitrary decision by management to close it down and outsource it. I cannot believe after all I've done for this place and for all the work I've put in, that this is the thanks I get. So, they told me that I won't be let go - that they had other jobs for people like me who were surplus to requirements. You know what they've got me doing? Clerical work. I've been a manager for 15 years and now I'm a clerk. Oh, they pay me the same money, but it's not the money is it?

I am just so angry. When I go to work, I can hardly think for being so angry and upset that my section got the boot and other areas, like this stupid survey team can still keep operating. Look at their budget and the returns they bring in. What a joke!

So, in conclusion

- The provision of organisational justice – particularly procedural and interactional – will enhance acceptance of dispute outcomes and should underpin all decision making processes including performance appraisal, recruitment and promotion interviews;
- Grievance procedures provide a structured approach to ensuring workplace justice but:
 - Supervisors and managers need training (in process and interactional justice)
 - Employees need encouragement to use the internal processes

Grievance procedures should be reviewed to ensure **Transaction Costs** are low; that there is **Satisfaction with Outcomes**; that there are no negative **effects on relationships**, that **Recurrence** has not occurred and that **Justice** was delivered.

SOURCES

Sources

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