

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR DEVELOPING CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEMS

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The questions below, in summary form, are designed to look closely at the conflicts that arise in an organization. The responses would be the basis of the design of a conflict resolution system for the organization.

WHAT IS THE CONFLICT ABOUT?

- Who are the disputants?
- What are the issues that are typically in dispute?
- What do people believe is causing these disputes? What do people typically do when these disputes occur?
- What is one thing that might be done to prevent or resolve the dispute?
- How do people who are not involved in the conflict describe it? How does the organization explain the conflict? How acclimated to the conflict is the organization? Does the organization view accommodating the conflict as less troublesome than going through the process of resolving it? Why?

HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY HANDLE DISPUTES?

- What do people do if they have a complaint?
- What is the cultural norm for addressing conflict? Avoid it? Accommodate to it? Compromise? Engage in it? Collaborate in creating a solution?
- What happens when disputes are negotiated? Do the parties search for settlements that will satisfy each other's interests or focus chiefly on their respective rights?
- How frequently do negotiations break down? What happens when they do?
- Do the parties turn to others -- supervisors, lawyers, union officials, friends--for help in negotiating? Are disputes turned over to superiors for resolution? Do parties turn to a neutral person for mediation? How often?

WHY ARE DISPUTES HANDLED THIS WAY?

- How satisfied are disputants with the procedures that are available? Do they know how to use the procedures in a way to generate a satisfactory resolution?
- Are some disputes being left essentially unresolved simply because no established procedure exists to deal with them?
- Does a mediation procedure exist that focuses on the interests and needs of those involved in the conflict?
- Do the existing procedures provide an opportunity for each person's "day in court"? Can disputants air their grievances fully on their own terms? Do disputants have control over the procedure? Do disputants participate in shaping the outcome? Does the procedure allow and welcome the expression of emotions? Do they think the procedure is fair?

- How skilled are the disputants in key conflict resolution skills such as listening, identifying interests, problem-solving, exploring creative options, negotiation?

HOW MUCH DOES CONFLICT COST?

- How long do the procedures you use take? How long do disputes continue, whether they are being handled through your process or otherwise?
- How satisfied are disputants with the outcomes of disputes? The process?
- What effect do existing procedures have on personal or organizational relationships?
- How often do the same disputes recur because they were never resolved?
- What costs are associated with the continuation of the conflict, in terms of staff time, staff energy, staff stress, missed work, diversion of time and attention from projects, monetary costs?

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS/SYSTEM?

- In what ways is conflict resolution impacted by existing decision-making procedures? How centralized are they? Hierarchical? Bureaucratic?
- How are procedures in use affected by the organization's formal and informal reward systems? What kind of dispute resolution behavior is rewarded by superiors? By peers? By the "culture of conflict" within the organization?
- What impact do other systems like hiring, discipline, feedback, evaluation, compensation, and training have on the dispute resolution system?
- How does the surrounding culture of the organization impact the conflict resolution/transformation procedures that are used?

WHAT SHOULD INFORM THE OVERALL DESIGN?

- Why are some procedures used and not others? What functions are served by power contests and other high-cost procedures? What hinders the use of interest-based procedures?
- Is it necessary to have different processes for different kinds of disputes?
- What procedures should be built into the system? What should be the sequences?
- How can people be motivated to use these procedures? How can people be given the necessary skills to use these procedures?
- How can the system be made self-adjusting? What mechanisms need to be set up for learning, feedback, and adaptation?

IS THERE ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR THE NEW SYSTEM?

- Is there motivation to implement the system, build coalitions to support them, assure allocation of resources, develop monitoring and evaluation procedures, and use

information from the conflict to create a self-learning system?

- How much will it cost to build and support the new system? To allow for ongoing maintenance, modification? How have you assured the allocation of resources for the system?
- Have disputants been supported to use the new procedures? Should the parties be trained or coached in the new procedures?
- How should the success or failures of the system be evaluated?