Daniel, D. (2001). *Conflict Resolution*. Sydney: McGraw-Hill.

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As long as there are individual differences in the workplace, there will be grounds for conflict not only between management and the shopfloor, but also between employees at each and every level of the organisation. All animals – including humans – have an evolutionary derived need to compete and strive to both secure and improve their position in the hierarchical pecking order of their genus. Hence, the subject matter in Dana's book *Conflict Resolution* is and will always remain important regardless of the management philosophy adopted for mediating employer-employee relations. Furthermore, as a result of increased global competition and the attendant need to increase profitability by 'reducing the bottom line', conflict in the contemporary workplace is more than ever likely to be attributable to both in-fighting over diminishing resource bases within and between organisational units, and reduced opportunities for stable employment.

Conflict Resolution offers to provide "Mediation Tools for Everyday Workday Life". The book comprises eight chapters and outlines four distinct mediation tools: managerial mediation, self-mediation, team mediation, and preventative mediation. Managerial mediation involves a simple third-party intervention to resolve conflict between employees for whose performance that manager is responsible. 'Self-remediation' is defined as "a dialogue tool for use by individuals who are personally involved in conflict with another person" (p.10); and techniques for doing so are discussed in chapter 5. These tips include finding the right time and place to talk, preventing interruptions and distractions, a dialogue checklist, and how to strive for a win-win solution. Team mediation is used by team leaders for "resolving disputes among members that involves the leader acting as a low-power, neutral third party" (p.11). The main difference between this and self-remediation is that in the latter the mediator is actually one of the individuals involved in the conflict and hence is not just acting as a facilitator but is also representing her own immediate personal interests. Preventative mediation involves adopting non-adversarial approaches to managing differences in workplace relations and is the underlying principle of *Conflict Resolution.*

In chapter one, workplace conflict is defined as a problem involving two or more employees who are interdependent, are experiencing anger and have personalised the issue of contention, with the result that their behaviours are effecting work activity. Hence, conflict should not be confused with personal indecision, disagreement, or stress – although these may lead to, or arise from conflict, they are not conflict in and of themselves.

However, the inclusion of interdependence as a prerequisite for conflict is confusing. Interdependence is defined as a situation wherein "each needs something from the other and are vulnerable if they don't get it" (p4). As noted above, though, conflict can arise from widely separated individuals within an organisation competing for limited resources. Hence,

to suggest that interdependence is an issue in this case is arguably something of a misnomer, as it actually requires another party *not* to compete. That is, one person could proceed with their plans without conflict if another party were to relinquish their claim to a common resource. An example here might involve individuals from different departments who are competing for a limited number of yearly promotions. From the perspective of those persons who routinely carry out their jobs without assistance from other employees applying for the same promotions, interdependence is effectively reduced to zero. Nevertheless, conflict can still ensue between these applicants. Such contests are territorial in nature, and, as Dana suggests, might be resolved by using either power or by some determination of rights.

Instead of 'interdependence', a simpler criterion of conflict might be any situation in which the aims or behaviours of one party are not perceived to be congruent or complimentary with those of another. The notion of interdependence is arguably more relevant to managing workplace relations *after* a conflict of interests where 'winners' and 'losers' are still required to work with each other to some degree. In these situations, Dana suggests that there is a third approach to managing conflict: interest reconciliation. This approach is non-adversarial and, by searching for solutions compatible to the needs of both parties, in essence aims for a win-win solution instead of a win-lose one.

Given that humans can ultimately only compete for limited resources within a finite eco-system, interest reconciliation would appear to be the most logical approach to managing all conflicts. Unfortunately, as Dana observes, evolution has hard-wired into humans the same innate 'fight' and 'flight' responses found in other animals. These autonomic reactions were strategies perfectly suited to daily survival issues and maintaining a grasp on the social pecking order. However, in the modern workplace, such reflexive strategies are ill suited to long-term strategic partnerships and organisational wellbeing.

Conflict Resolution provides a useful checklist for assessing and understanding conflict situations and deciding which mediation tool is appropriate. The checklist comprises of: the number of parties involved in a conflict and their degree of interaction (i.e., interdependency); whether those parties represent only themselves or a larger constituency, and also their authority to negotiate (which might be absolute in the case of interpersonal conflict, but low if leaders of conflicting parties must confer with constituents for approval); the degree of urgency to resolve the conflict; and the communication channels available for negotiation (eg, face to face, telephone, videoconference).

Dana correctly argues that although conflict might at first appear to be a hidden cost, it does in fact impact on the financial bottom line. To this end, relatively simple guides are offered for estimating the costs associated with conflict which might arise as a consequence of unproductive or lost work time, poor decision making, and unnecessary restructuring and employee turnover (both of which represent attempts by the organisation and individual respectively to reduce or completely avoid conflict). For example, it is suggested that chronic unresolved conflict is a major contributing factor in at least 50% of voluntary departures, and that the cost of replacing a professional such as an engineer might be as high as 1 ½ times that person's total annual salary package. When factors such as these are taken into account, there is an obvious potential economic benefit from at least first considering mediation instead of litigation when faced with workplace conflict. Further, it also presents a solid case

for strategically managing conflict from the outset (which is covered in chapter eight) Indeed, the advice in chapter two – particularly the simple "cost estimation worksheet" – would be quite useful for demonstrating to graduate business students the often underestimated impact which human factors (or a misunderstanding of them) might have on the corporate bottom line.

In summation, the material in *Conflict Resolution* is presented in a friendly, easy-to-read manner. Each chapter is succinct, provides relevant examples (often in the form of case studies), and includes numerous inset information boxes. These provide quick tips and hints for managing conflict, examples of how other people have handled it, and also suggest when to be cautious and how to reduce the possibility of making mistakes when dealing with conflict. However, it is doubtful whether there really needs to be seven different types of 'boxes' (each with its own logo) to disseminate this advice. In the attempt to 'shrink wrap' conflict management and make it appealing and assessable to all, the author has perhaps gone too far in this one instance and in doing so has made these hints slightly more complicated than they need to be. Overall, though, the author is correct in his claim that the material in this book is worthy of attention to all employees, and *Conflict Resolution* would make a worthy addition to the reading list of any course in organisational behaviour, or could perhaps serve as a stand-alone text for a graduate business subject bearing the same name.