

To investigate the types and effectiveness of conflict management practices in
use by Irish employers

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Abstract:

The objective of this research was to investigate the types of conflict management practices in use in Irish employers, at this time. It was felt that the time was right for an investigation of this sort, because of the change currently taking place in the Irish state dispute resolution landscape, and the importance of conflict management to the effective management of the organisation.

In order to research this topic, a quantitative study was carried out to examine what conflict management practices were in use, whether organisations had adopted any Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) procedures, and whether employers were utilising any innovative methods of conflict management and resolution. The research also examined the effectiveness of the conflict management practices under investigation in order to infer a relationship between these and the grievance rate in organisations.

Student Declaration:

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Chapter 1 - Introduction:

The research focuses on the area of conflict management in the workplace, and the systems in place to prevent and resolve it. Although conflict can be helpful, in some cases, as it helps to increase motivation and teamwork, very often, conflict can escalate, if not resolved. Conflict can also be damaging to the parties concerned, for example, in interpersonal conflict or conflict with ones employer or line manager can manifest as stress, absence and demotivation

Method of research -

The research will utilise a survey previously conducted in research on the role that line managers play in resolving conflict (Teague and Roche 2012), and in the use of conflict management systems in Ireland (Roche and Teague 2012a).

This research also draws on the results of a qualitative study carried out to determine the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Irish firms (Teague et al 2015). This research will seek to further the study of conflict management to examine the types and use of conflict management systems in use in organisations in Ireland, along with their effectiveness in resolving conflict. In order to do this, the research will compare and contrast traditional methods of dispute resolution with alternative and innovative methods.

The research will also examine the role that line managers play in resolving conflict at source.

Conflict resolution in the workplace -

Although both union and non-union firms are, for the most part, considered to have formal procedures in place for dealing with workplace issues, the extent to which firms are successful in resolving conflicts depends on a number of factors including historical relations between managers and employees, employee resistance to change and “poorly designed or inadequately implemented conflict management systems” (Teague, and Doherty 2011).

The extent to which organisations are utilising conventional methods, including grievance procedures, and alternative avenues for resolving workplace issues has not been fully examined. Previous studies have shown that multi-national organisations operating in Ireland are not using innovative techniques, such as ADR for resolving workplace conflict (Teague and Doherty, 2011). Teague et al (2015) posed the question “If mediation brings such positive benefits, why is it adopted only by a minority of organisations?” (Teague et al. 2015, page 6) - one answer may be that organisations and HR managers are reluctant to deviate from tried and tested dispute measures.

The literature review will look at the ways in which organisations resolve conflict strategically; using some form of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) or innovative techniques; the prevalence of formal grievance and disciplinary procedures in organisations (both union and non-union). The literature review will also investigate the role of line manager’s in resolving and indeed,

preventing, conflict before it escalates; and the ways in which firms are devising ways to “socialize” conflict out of the workplace (Currie et al, 2016). It is evident that there is not yet one process that is used throughout Human Resource Management (HRM) (Currie et al 2016).

Line managers -

Line managers have a role in preventing conflict in organisations by performing a coaching or mentoring role in order to identify issues and problems with subordinates before it escalates in to conflict (Teague and Roche 2012d).

Managers must be proactive in dealing with conflict at its earliest stages, before it requires intervention by HR (CIPD, 2008b). However, very often, managers are ill-equipped or do not follow procedures and conflict can escalate over small tensions.

It has been observed previously that Human Resource (HR) manager's can be “cautious innovators” (Teague et al 2015, page-7) when it comes to conflict; as changes to systems that are already in place may cause disruption within the organisation. Instead they may prefer to stick to tried and tested approaches. This may serve to explain the reluctance of the literature to identify one singular strategy for conflict resolution in the workplace.

Conclusion –

A literature review in chapter 2 will discuss the current knowledge and ideas surrounding conflict, its management and its impact on the workplace. The range of workplace conflict resolution practices, including the role of line managers, and any innovative methods of conflict resolution, will be discussed. The research questions that are the objectives of the research outline and discussed in chapter 3, and a number of hypotheses are postulated. Chapter 4 will discuss the research methodology. This demonstrates how insight in to conflict resolution in the workplace was examined by way of a workplace survey, and how this method is preferable over other methods of research, in relation to the objectives of this study. This chapter will also discuss how the results and findings were analysed. The results of the research will be presented in chapter 5. The research demonstrates the type of practices in use in Irish workplaces, their effectiveness; be they formal or informal. The research also evaluated the role of line managers in conflict management. In chapters 6 and 7 the implications of the results will be discussed.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review –

2.1 Introduction –

This review of the HRM literature will review workplace conflict and examine the conflict management processes that, according to the literature, are most prevalent in the workplace. Conflict management in the workplace can be defined as consisting of formal or informal processes, and as internal and external practices. Conflict in the workplace can be disruptive, time-consuming and can have significant cost implications. As organisations and management structures are evolving, the processes around preventing and resolving conflict must also evolve. Line managers have a significant role to play in preventing conflict; being as they are, working so closely with their teams, and monitoring their performance and behaviour.

2.2 Conflict in the workplace –

Workplace conflict has been defined as “differences of view and conflict amongst individual employee’s and their employer; amongst individuals; and between groups of employees whether unionized or not, and their employer. It is recognised that the resolution of workplace conflict can have beneficial effects for employers, employees and other stakeholders in the business” (Teague et al 2015 page 2).

Conflict can in turn be distinguished by ‘collective conflict’, which usually refers to industrial conflict, but may also refer to conflict within teams, and by ‘individual conflict’, normally between employees or between an employee and their manager. There are a number of facets of conflict mentioned in the literature, including relationship conflict (or interpersonal conflict), task conflict and process conflict.

The 2015 CIPD survey on conflict found that the number one cause of interpersonal conflict in a workplace is “differences in personality or styles of working” and conflict with one’s line manager or colleagues is most prevalent (Gifford 2015). Additionally, employees may allege that their managers or employees have carried out inappropriate behaviour, for example, in the area of pay, health and safety, discrimination and bullying (Teague et al 2012). Task conflict can be defined as conflict over what to do, process conflict can be categorised as conflict over how to complete a task (Behfar et al 2008).

The nature of conflict in the workplace in Ireland has changed since the 1970’s and 1980’s; which were punctuated by collective industrial relations disputes and adversarial relations between employers, employees, and their unions (Teague 2005). At that time, conflict in the workplace was seen as “phlegmatic” (Currie, et al, 2016, page-1); something to be dealt with, but necessary in order to achieve workers rights, which is in stark contrast to the modern HRM view, which is predominantly, that conflict of any sort, is viewed negatively as it takes away

from the aim of the organisation which is achieving high performance. The focus in modern organisations is nearly always on resolving conflict (reactive) rather than managing conflict (pro-active) (Lipsky and Avinger 2008). Rahim (2002) proposes that conflict is a natural process, and should not be eliminated, but used to encourage organisational learning, and improve the effectiveness of the organisation. This view of conflict is built on the premise that conflict serves to encourage and promote organisational performance, and intra-group or substantive conflict may provide opportunities for problem solving and innovation. Rahim proposes that “affective conflict” (that which is negative) should be reduced (Rahim 2002, page-229).

2.4 Types of conflict

2.4.1 The growth of individual conflict –

A dramatic trend arising in the last few decades is the rise in individual conflict in the workplace, and the corresponding decline in collective conflict. From the 1990's on, Ireland saw less collective conflict than at any other time in its history; however, the reverse has been true for individual grievances in the workplace. The numbers of individual employees taking their cases to the state-agencies for resolution has increased steadily since the 1990's and in to the 2000's (Teague et al 2015).

There may a number of factors that contribute to this rise in individual conflict including, the increase in employment legislation; the increasing pressure and intensification of work; the presence of a highly-educated workforce; increased focus on performance management; and an increased focus on teamwork, which may result in personality clashes with colleagues and line managers (Currie et al 2016). The CIPD (2015) study on conflict in relation to individual conflict found that the most common effect of individual conflict in the workplace was a drop in motivation, commitment or stress, absenteeism, employee turnover, these are all manifestations of unresolved conflict (Gifford 2015), (Teague et al 2012).

2.4.2 Collective or industrial conflict -

Teague (2005) notes that the voluntarist mentality that punctuated Irish industrial relations for much of the 20th century has largely been silenced; there is no longer a strong mentality of management against unions in private sector collective bargaining (Teague 2005). The advent of social partnership had promoted an air of cooperation between both sides. Social partnership had sought to provide both formal and informal approaches so that “serious industrial conflicts” were addressed quickly and efficiently (Roche and Teague 2011, page-439). The rise of multi-nationals within the Irish economic landscape has also threatened the leverage of the unions, such as they are, reluctant to negotiate and concede to trade unions (Teague 2005).

Group conflict may be expressed in many different ways compared to individual conflict, for example, in power-based mechanisms, such as strikes, lockouts and work-to-rule (Teague et al 2012).

2.4.3 Conflict within teams –

The sources of conflict within teams can comprise interpersonal conflict between individuals, and also task or process conflict, which involves disagreements over how the work should be done. As organisations evolve, many large organisations have designated formal-team working, which may occur in an organisation that structures its organisation around self-managed teams. This flatter organisational structure can have important positives for collaboration and team working. In this scenario, it has been postulated that negative conflict can have damaging implications for this team environment, as the conflict may damage performance objectives (Gilin Oore et al 2015), it has also been postulated that those who are involved in conflict may be thought of as less than a team player if they take a grievance. In these organisations, it may be more likely that conflict is resolved informally as much as possible. Nevertheless, in order for this structure to be effective, employees must not have a fear of repercussions from management if they raise a grievance, and any grievances must be resolved satisfactorily, otherwise, employees may harbour ill-feeling, and this may eventually cause them to exit the organisation.

2.3 Conflict management strategy –

Rahim (2002) postulated that in order to manage conflict effectively; organisations must first “diagnose” the reason for the conflict, and provide “intervention”.

Organisations can then decide on the conflict style required, and use this style to reduce the affective conflict. Intervention can consist of two forms; process, which allows participants to manage conflict using various conflict handling styles; matching the style to the scenario.

A structural intervention may involve a change in the organisations organisational culture and systems, for example, procedures, reward, and hierarchy, this serves to encourage substantive conflict. The management of conflict in this way can provide opportunities for individual or group learning, and can provide the feedback necessary to ensure that further conflict of this nature is dealt with in a similar fashion (Rahim 2002).

The approach proposed by Rahim has implications for a strategic view of conflict management in an organisation. More recently, studies have looked at the idea of “conflict management systems” (Roche and Teague 2012a, page-231), which may consist of a number of rights-based and interest-based practices, to provide for different preferences; different issues and conflicts; and the ability to allow participants to move between practices (Roche and Teague 2012a) (Lipsky and Avgar 2008). Interest-based practices can involve pro-active conflict management, as well as providing processes for dispute resolution.

The nature of the conflict must still be “diagnosed” to ensure the appropriate practice or style is applied, conflict will nearly always start with a power or rights-based approach and move on to more interest-based mechanisms as the conflict activity moves on.

In their study on conflict management systems, Roche and Teague (2012) found that the presence of one or more interest-based practices combined with rights-based practices did not have an affect on the organisational outcomes studied. Conversely, Lipsky and Avgar (2008) reported that the concept of conflict management systems had only permeated a quarter of large firms studied. The results of both of these studies may suggest that organisations are not yet using interest-based processes, as part of a wider conflict management framework, or that they are not using them in sufficient numbers for their effectiveness to make a difference to the organisation.

2.4 Innovative practices for workplace dispute resolution –

Innovative methods of dispute resolution can have various definitions.

An employer who only uses grievance procedures, or who doesn’t have any formal procedures at all, may consider mediation, and other alternative methods, to be an innovative practice. In most workplaces, conflict management procedures are reactive. Innovative internal dispute resolution policies have not been widely adopted amongst Irish employers, although the use of formal “open-door policy” procedures is common (Teague et al 2015). In the first large-scale

study of ADR in use in Irish workplaces, it was found that HR managers were reluctant to deviate from procedures already in place, and organisations were slow to introduce innovations in conflict management (Teague et al 2015). There may be a number of reasons for this, time; cost; the work involved in altering practices; a fear that by changing practices; it may lead to renewed vigour in pursuing grievances.

2.5 Evolution of external methods of dispute resolution –

Employment tribunals were originally established to provide an inexpensive and relatively quick route to dispute resolution. They were set up as a quasi-judicial forums, presided over by highly-trained and experienced adjudicators, and not by judges, as it was felt that judges may not have the “empathy and understanding” (Hann and Teague 2012,page-533) to deal with employment disputes. However, employment law and the complexity of cases under dispute have increased considerably over the years. External state agencies have an important role to play in “employment standard-setting” (Hann and Teague 2012), where their decisions and determinations may filter as ‘best practice’ down to organisations.

In Ireland, the systems pertaining to conventional methods of workplace dispute resolution are currently in a state of transition. Following the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act 2015 and the establishment of the Workplace Relations Commission, there now exists a “two-level process” for the resolution of disputes, the Labour Relations Commission, the Equality Tribunal, and the first instance functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) have now been merged in to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). The WRC has the “responsibility for the promotion and improvement of industrial and employment relations generally” (Workplace Relations Commission 2016a).

The Labour Court now provides the function of the appeal body, as well as its current role, where it acts as an industrial relations tribunal (Compton and Harkin 2015). The Labour Court is the last step in the workplace dispute provision of the state (the civil courts remain available to all parties), dispute resolution arrangements in the organisation or the other dispute machinery of the state should have been fully utilised before a case comes to the Labour Court (WRC, 2015).

This simplification of the external dispute mechanisms provides a system where there is much more chance of a dispute being resolved within an acceptable time frame. In the six months since the WRC was established (to March 2016), the waiting time has been reduced to three months from over one year (Workplace Relations Commission 2016b). The WRC also provides early resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation, and monitoring and enforcement to ensure employment rights are enforced (Workplace Relations Commission 2016a).

In the four months to the end of December 2015, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) adjudication service (which now comprises the services of the Employment Appeals Tribunal, Rights Commissioners and the Equality Tribunal) received 1,690 complaints (Workplace Relations Commission 2016a), in 2014, the Employment Appeals Tribunal received 4,162 complaints to this body alone (Employment Appeals Tribunal 2015). The rise in the number of cases being referred to state agencies for dispute resolution may occur for a variety of reasons; employee voice, fairness of procedures and the provision or acceptance of organisational dispute resolution procedures, fairness of treatment internally, employee representation. The collapse of social partnership and the decline in union representation in Ireland has meant that many disputes that may have been classed as “collective” are now being taken by individual employees (Hann and Teague 2012).

As the influence of unions in the workplace is declining, the absence of representation for employees with their organisation, external bodies, with their emphasis on objectivity and fairness may be more attractive to employees.

It is important, in order to stem this flow of employee's pursuing their cases external to organisations, that procedures are in place that allow employee's to resolve their grievances fairly and equitably within a clear framework.

For a practice to be effective, the employee must be given a "voice" within the organisation that is more attractive than exit (Aram and Salipante 1981).

In small organisations, there may not be the resources to invest in HRM departments, and they may not have well-developed HR policies, resulting in a situation where "significant numbers of employees may be working in organizations where even traditional workplace conflict management practices are absent" (Roche and Teague 2011). Correspondingly, Hanna and Teague (2012) found that the profiles of those employees who have taken cases to the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) are mostly lower-paid workers, which suggest that despite lower-pay, employees have strong reasons to take a case.

Employees may take cases for a number of reasons; because they have a right to vindicate their rights; there is increasing awareness from employees of their employment rights; with the decline in union representation in these organisations, they perceive there to be little opportunity for voice and justice in their workplaces; their un-willingness to use the procedures in their organisation,

for example, because of a sense that they may not be treated fairly, or because of an absence of procedures altogether, or perhaps; because they believe that they will be awarded a significant sum from their employer if they take their case to an external body, furthermore, they may take a case clear their name (Hann and Teague 2012).

The increasing legalistic nature of the state dispute resolution agencies has meant that most of those taking cases have some form of legal representation (Hann and Teague 2012). The dispute resolution machinery of the state have an important job to do in terms of adjudicating in disputes where there is an impasse or in complex cases, where legal representation may well be needed. In an organisational environment, the right procedures, fairness and mechanisms should be in place that allows employees to resolve their grievances without the formality or expense of outside agencies.

2.6 Organisational dispute resolution –

Organisations may adopt a particular approach to conflict resolution for a variety of reasons, Teague and Roche (2012) in a study aimed at assessing the role of line managers in workplace conflict resolution, identified a number of reasons for why organisations may choose to strengthen their dispute resolution approaches including; responding to the increased legislation that guarantees employment rights (and the growing assertiveness of employees aware of their rights); adapting work practices to competitive pressures; resolving conflict

quickly and effectively, so that a minimum amount of time is spent on it (Teague and Roche 2012). The cost and disruption that workplace conflict brings must also be a factor in the conflict resolution approach chosen. The way that collective conflict is dealt with in organisations can differ significantly from the ways in which individual conflict is dealt with. The provision of collective agreements and collective bargaining in unionized organisations make provision for reconciling the needs of management with those of unions, in order to maintain employment stability (Teague et al 2012).

A survey of organisations within Ireland reported that the majority of employers were relying on conventional methods of dispute resolution, e.g. grievance procedures, and they had not adopted many forms of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) (Teague et al 2015). Teague (2012) found that only a minority of employers have appointed external experts for mediation and conciliation, or used the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (formerly Labour Relations Commission) in order to resolve disputes (Teague et al 2012).

In contrast, in their study on innovative conflict management systems in collective conflict, Roche, Teague and (2012), it was found that the adoption of ADR mechanisms was much higher in group situations, than in individual conflict situations (Teague et al 2012). Roche and Teague (2011), in turn, found that organisations (in collective conflict situations) could be divided in to those who used no formal procedures at all; those who use formal procedures only, with a few ADR practices, and those who use ADR in place of formal procedures (Roche and Teague 2011).

While the effective resolution of conflict seeks to ensure management and employees are working to achieve organisational performance objectives, rather than embroiled in conflict, it also may serve the purpose of ensuring that any conflict is efficiently disposed of, so that it does not affect other employees, and the organisation as a whole. If an organisation can resolve conflict in-house, this can ensure that conflict does not become an unjustifiable expense, of time and money. The conflict resolution practices chosen by the organisation, may also serve to develop an employment climate that is less adversarial (Teague and Roche 2012) (Teague et al 2015).

Many companies may also structure their conflict management systems to ensure the influence of unions is kept to a minimum, “union avoidance” (Lipsky and Avgar 2004). Teague and Roche (2012) found no evidence that management would specifically structure their conflict management practices to reduce the influence of trade unions, instead they found a form of “union suppression” (Teague and Roche 2012, Page-246), where organisations seek to “contain” unions, albeit with little investment of money and of time. Nevertheless, whether organisations seek to reduce the influence of unions, or work with them in the traditional way, if the organisation does not provide for fair procedures itself, the presence of the unions provides a degree of fairness for employees.

The introduction of the Industrial Relations Act 2015, which re-introduces collective bargaining to the workplace relations landscape, compels non-union employers to adopt the practice of negotiating with their employees (through an excepted body) with the aim of reaching agreement on a range of issues, including pay and conditions. In the event of a trade dispute, and in the absence of a negotiation strategy, and provided a number of conditions are met, including if the number of employees attached to the union is not insignificant (having regard to the total number of workers employed by said employer) the union can, through the Workplace Relations Commission, bargain on behalf of the employees for improved terms and conditions, comparable to workers in similar employments (Given 2016). This effectively brings the collective negotiation role of trade unions to bear on a non-union employer.

2.7 Conflict resolution practices –

In the literature, conflict management techniques can be distinguished as “rights-based” or “interest-based” practices, and in some cases, “power-based” practices (Lytle et al 1999). Rights-based practices include, formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures, peer review panels comprised of employees or managers, the utilisation of state agencies where agreement cannot be reached, and the use of external adjudicators to ensure objectivity and fairness. Interest-based practices serve to acknowledge the interests of both parties and ensure they move on from the conflict (Roche and Teague 2012a) (Teague and Roche 2012).

It has been argued that organisations should provide for a number of conflict management practices, based on rights-based processes, interest-based practices and power-based processes, if necessary, depending on the situation (Gifford 2015) (Lytle et al 1999). In order to resolve conflict effectively, participants may have to move between these three scenarios, this “loop-back” is important as it provides the opportunity for participants to move back and forward over the different conflict resolution strategies according to what works best in each scenario (Lytle et al 1999) (Roche and Teague 2012a). This is a departure from classical theories of conflict management that suggest that participants must follow a linear path through successfully higher layers of management (Roche and Teague 2012a). This can have important implications as employees may feel that the procedures are fair if they can choose where they enter or move to in the process.

There are important implications to the processes used, for a number of reasons, in a rights-based situation, participants may argue over who is right or wrong, under the law, but the cause of the dispute may never be addressed. This forms a power and rights-based approach. However, it may also be argued that in a rights-based scenario, the decision over who is “right” or “wrong” may be taken out of the hands of the participants (Lytle et al 1999), this objectivity can provide an incentive for an employee to pursue this approach, although it may not work in their favour. Nevertheless, a power-based process (or indeed a rights-based process, if not handled correctly) can have implications for the working relationship, which may be damaged beyond repair. If a case is taken externally after the employee has left the employment, the likelihood of an employee returning to work for that employer is very slim, especially given the long waiting times for cases that Ireland has recently experienced. This long delay meant that an employee might have left the employment of the employer over a year before their case was heard. Although the waiting times have been much reduced since the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act 2015; they now stand at just over three months (Workplace Relations Commission 2016b).

Interest-based practices serve to reconcile the interests and needs of both parties in to a workable agreement. Although an interest-based approach may be preferable for preserving the working relationship and moving beyond the conflict, this type of approach only works if both parties are willing to engage and cooperate on a fair level. The choice of strategy may depend on the willingness of the parties to negotiate, and the repercussions that they may experience, if they do come to the negotiation table (Lytle et al 1999).

In these scenarios, the employer nearly always holds the upper hand and they may use their “power” to influence and intimidate the employee. Ground rules and fairness must be the cornerstone of interest-based approaches.

Teague (2005) states that organisations must acknowledge that some grievances will require state third party intervention; it’s important the conflict management strategy of the organisation provides for a rights-based approach, but also for less formal approaches, that serve to acknowledge the interests of both parties. The provision of formal procedures is important, not only to protect the organisation in the event of an external case being taken, but also to provide employees with fair procedures.

2.7.1 Formal dispute resolution/Rights-based practices –

The adoption of formal conflict resolution procedures, such as a grievance and disciplinary procedures still varies widely between organisations; unionized organisations tend to have well-developed policies (Lewin 1987) (Teague et al 2011). In contrast, non-union workplaces may have little or no procedures in place in order to resolve employee grievances. Those that do have procedures, may use these in a reactive nature, rather than pro-actively work to reduce the incidence of conflict. Procedures that are in place may vary between simple guidelines related to submitting of complaints to named manager's, to more complex processes involving "panels of senior managers to hear grievances" or "peer review panels" (Colvin 2013). In non-union workplaces, the existence of procedures provides employee's with "indirect representation" and employment protections that mirror those provided by unionized organisations (Colvin 2013).

In reporting the effectiveness of mechanisms of organisational dispute resolution, such as grievance procedures, Colvin (2013) posits that consideration must be given to, first of all, their "existence versus the usage" (Colvin 2013, page-260). The organizational context and the processes for resolving disputes, must be considered in analysing whether dispute resolution procedures are effective; in a highly controlling management structure, there may be more conflict "trigger" events, however, the influence of management control may discourage employees from raising grievances (Colvin 2013).

An organisation that experiences a high number of grievances, may not necessarily have high levels of conflict, but rather, the procedure that is in use for resolving dispute may be effective so that employees are comfortable using the procedure; rather than seeking resolution outside the organisation (Colvin 2013). On the other hand, organisations that promote increased employee participation and engagement may have less grievances simply because employee's feel more valued, committed and trusting of their employers (Colvin 2013). In these organisations, grievances may be resolved informally, so employees do not have recourse to use the organisational dispute resolution procedures. The overall employee satisfaction with the organisation could be measured by way of employee surveys, team briefs, and communication (Teague and Roche 2012).

In Ireland, the Code of Practice on Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures (SI 146 2000) (Labour Relations Commission 2006), sets out the recommended process that organisations should follow in defining their own procedures. There is currently no legally binding requirement for organisations to provide procedures for their employees. However, if an employer was to defend a case in front of a state agency, for example, the Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court, they would be almost certain lose on procedural grounds, if they had not followed clear and fair procedures.

Peer and management review panels –

A peer review panel is comprised of employees who may hear both sides of a case, consider the evidence and propose a resolution. Whether or not the resolution is binding depends on the organisation (Teague 2005). While this form of dispute resolution may work well for simple disputes, it would require strict confidentiality, impartiality and training on the part of the dispute panel. This form of dispute resolution may also rule against the wishes of the employer, therefore, the ground rules would need to be such that no repercussions can be entered against those that are members of the panel. A management review board works in the same way, except the panel is comprised of managers, rather than employees. The effectiveness of a management review board could be questioned as to their impartiality, as they would be expected to follow the organisational line in all dealings with employees. These review panels have found least favour in previous research, Roche and Teague (2012) found only 9% of those surveyed using these practices in disputes (Roche and Teague 2012a)

External adjudicators/Employee advocates –

The process of adjudication involves a neutral third party hearing both sides in the case, reviewing the evidence, and offering a resolution, which may, or may not be binding. In Ireland, agents of the Workplace Relations Commission generally carry out the process of adjudication (Workplace Relations Commission 2015). The use of external experts, both to adjudicate on disputes and also to represent employees, in terms of employee advocates means that the ratio of power is more evenly distributed in a dispute situation. Employees may feel more empowered with a representative present.

In formal internal conflict resolution procedures, the levels of decision-making and the use of independent or non-management decision-makers have been shown to influence the use of grievance procedures by employees. The presence of non-managerial decision makers as the final step in the dispute procedure provides for “due process protections” (Colvin 2013, p-264) that give a considerable perception of procedural fairness to employees, resulting in a “neutrality effect” (Colvin 2003), whereby employees tend to be more likely to use procedures that contain these due process protections, and grievance rates will go up, but the level of conflict remains static. This may also be seen in procedures that offer opportunities for appeal. The same effect has been seen for other practices, such as, mediation, peer review panels or adjudication (Colvin 2013).

In the absence of due process, employees may not perceive the procedures as fair, and may be unlikely to use them (Colvin 2003) (Lewin 1987).

“Organisational due process is a fair and less costly means of resolving disputes than litigation” (Aram and Salipante 1981, p-198);. It is important that, in providing appropriate formal procedures in the organisation, the employer is adhering to their own procedures, and they are constructed to be procedurally fair (Aram and Salipante 1981).

2.7.2 Alternative methods of dispute resolution/Interest-based practices –

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is a construct of the American employment dispute system, which, following a Supreme Court ruling in 1991 (*Gilmer v Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp*), set the scene for non-union employers to bind their employees in to using “binding arbitration” (Teague 2005, page-22) for the resolution of employment disputes, and made it difficult for employees to access the courts system for resolution of disputes (Teague 2005). Nevertheless, the number of opponents and proponents of this judgement may have led the way in encouraging American corporations to develop their own dispute resolution mechanisms in order to distinguish in-house conflict resolution from external arbitration, which seeks to enforce employment rights. Lipsky and Seeber (1998) found that ADR practice in American corporations “is not haphazard or incidental but rather seems to be integral to a systematic, long term-change in way corporations resolve disputes” (Lipsky and Seeber 1998,page-8).

However, Teague (2015) argues that American corporations have sought to develop ADR practices, not because these practices have been proven to be a “superior way of managing conflict at work” (Teague et al 2015,page-292-293), but as a by-product of that country’s legal system where employees who take cases against their employer can be awarded significantly higher awards than, for example, in Ireland (Teague et al 2015).

Nevertheless, there may be a number of other reasons why organisations adopt ADR strategies, including “union substitution” (Teague 2005,page-23); employers preference for a less costly form of dispute resolution; employees preferences for more confidential resolution of disputes; less reliance on state agencies for dispute resolution; a focus on less hard forms of HRM, including the development of team-working. ADR practices also provide for a “holistic” view of conflict management; transforming workplace disputes in to cooperation (Lipsky and Avgar 2008).

The adoption of ADR practices must be initiated with the premise of maintaining due process protections and the principles of natural justice (Aram and Salipante 1981); employees should be given the opportunity to state their case, and have the right to be accompanied. These practices are not substitutes for fair procedures. One of the disadvantages of ADR may be the power exerted by the employer in a situation that is not adjudicated by an impartial third party.

Non-judicial ADR is composed of practices and mechanisms that utilise private or external experts for the management of disputes, but does not include the judicial processes, for example state-sponsored mediation, adjudication or conciliation. Organisations may adopt one of a number of ADR practices, in order to provide for effective resolution or management of conflict, it may be preferable for organisations to adopt a suite of practices, thereby ensuring that all employees have access to a process that they are comfortable with.

There a number of key ADR processes that have been highlighted in the literature. The appointment of a company ombudsperson; where an impartial third-party who operates inside the organisation, may investigate and engage in resolving disputes between parties (Aram and Salipante 1981). The ombudsperson may oversee peer-review panels and management-review boards, provide fact-finding and counselling between parties, they may also listen to a dispute and suggest a compromise, thereby acting in a conciliation capacity (Teague 2005) (Roche and Teague 2012a). These decisions may not be binding on the parties.

In a unionized environment, the process of negotiating on collective bargaining can take the form of an “adversarial approach” or an “interest-based or problem-solving” or a brainstorming approach (Teague et al 2012,page-5), an interest-based approach could utilise a number of practices or mechanisms for effective negotiation between the union and the employer. The use of innovative mechanisms for resolving group, or collective conflict include problem-solving

or brainstorming, which can help to find creative solutions to problems, this usually takes places between groups of employees and management, formal communication, and interest-based or ‘win-win’ bargaining involves processes aimed at reaching settlements that benefit all parties (Teague and Roche 2012d).

In a collective situation, disputes can be assisted by outside agencies in reaching settlement, this early-intervention, which can include mediation or joint fact-finding, can prevent groups reaching a situation where they are in deadlock, and need to resort to the use of power-based mechanisms, e.g. strikes or lockouts, this has been referred to as “assisted negotiations” (Teague et al 2012).

Mediation –

Mediation has emerged in the past decade as an effective way of addressing workplace conflict that is caused by “relationship-based conflict”- that which is caused by teamwork, performance management, or interpersonal conflict (Teague et al 2015). The appointment of external experts may assist in mediating between employees and assist in resolving disputes (Teague and Roche 2012d). Mediation can only take place where both parties voluntarily enter in to the process, and a number of ground rules are put in place. The results of mediation are non-binding on the parties. However, the use of mediation within organisations has not been fully evaluated.

Previous research has indicated that mediation may only be used, as a last resort; if there is a high risk of litigation or if a member of senior management is were in conflict with each other (Saundry et al 2016).

Practices aimed at preventing the spread of conflict –

The literature on conflict management focuses mainly on conflict management and conflict resolution techniques, however, there are “blurred boundaries” between “conflict resolution and conflict prevention” (Teague 2005), where conflict resolution techniques; which resolve conflict after it has begun, must work in conjunction with a climate of good employer-employee relations. Whereas conflict prevention, serves to manage conflict in a pro-active manner.

The literature categorises the below processes as ADR mechanisms, however, they could be considered preventative practices or forms of ADR, as they seek to develop a pro-active employment relations climate, where employees feel engaged and conflict is kept to a minimum; a form of commitment-orientated HRM. A combination of commitment-orientated HRM practices can ensure relations between employers and employees are maintained on a fair and equitable basis, providing justifiable reasons for decisions, and ensuring everyone is clear on the direction that the organisation is going. This can have important implications for the level of conflict that an organisation experiences.

Commitment-orientated HR practices -

The incidence, and outcome, of conflict management practices in an organisation can be influenced by the HR practices adopted by the organisation, many of these practices are associated with “commitment-orientated HRM” and include, as examples, “formal team-working; formal performance management; individual and group performance-related pay; profit-sharing or share ownership; a policy of no compulsory redundancies; common (single-status) terms and conditions or employment; regular team briefings to keep employees up to date on company plans; hiring for specified personality, values and attitudes during the recruitment process; and an objective of internal career progression for all employees “(Teague et al 2012, page -244). The literature shows that there is not yet clear evidence as to whether employers following commitment-orientated HRM practices are utilising forms of ADR (Teague et al 2012).

Open-door policy -

The provision of an open-door policy allows employees to be assured that they can discuss issues or concerns with their manager, in confidence and without fear of retaliation (Teague 2005). It also means that employees can skip their immediate manager if they wish to address a grievance with a more senior manager (Teague et al 2012).

Employee ‘hotlines’ and email-based ‘speak up’ services -

Employee hotlines and email-based procedures allow employees to ring an external advisor in order to discuss solutions to problems or issues (Teague and Roche 2012). The provision of these services can give peace of mind to employees, and can serve to prevent them seeking advice from legal sources (who may encourage them to take a case against their employer). In cases of illegal activity on the part of the employer, or invocation of a whistleblowing accusation, it is important that employees have impartial advice

A system of regular communication in an organisation can have enormous benefits, as it ensures that all stakeholders have access to all relevant information, and it allows the organisation to manage any upcoming change in a targeted and efficient way. Conflict in an individual or group situation can be prompted by a lack of communication and consultation from management to employees, and this can have significant adversarial affects especially where this concerns fundamental changes in the organisations, or in matters concerning pay

or other employment rights (Bennett 2013). The issue of pay and conditions can be a source of fraught conflict, and one that must be handled discreetly and efficiently, through the proper channels. In an organisation that has adopted performance-related pay, a clear performance management system should be in operation, so that employees are clear on the process, and the employer can prove that it acted in an equitable way.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (Judicial-ADR) –

Facilitation, conciliation and mediation are all types of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and, along with other forms of ADR, these all serve to ensure participants “move beyond conflict” (Corcoran 2015). The establishment of an early resolution service and a mediation in the WRC means that parties may avail of a mediation service, or early resolution service at the discretion of the WRC. The provision of this service, and particularly, for individual disputes, a mediation service for the state is welcomed, as it provides an alternative method of dispute resolution without the cost and “win-lose” approach of other methods of external dispute resolution. The primary facets of this service involve dealing with “interpersonal workplace relationships, equality mediations, and grievance and disciplinary procedural matters” (Workplace Relations Commission 2016a, page-8).

In industrial relations disputes, the provision of a conciliation service involves a negotiation process which is chaired by a neutral, experienced third-party, the process is voluntary and any agreements reached must be voluntary and by consensus. Over the period from October-December 2015, the conciliation service of the WRC achieved settlement in over 80% of industrial relations disputes referred to it (Workplace Relations Commission 2016a).

2.8 Informal approaches to workplace conflict resolution –

2.8.1 The role of line managers -

The CIPD (2015) study on conflict found that most employees tried to resolve conflict informally in the first instance, for example, with their line manager, or a member of HR, and only one in ten resorted to grievance procedures (Gifford 2015). Organisations that adopt a pro-active approach to conflict management have been found to have line managers at the core of this approach (Teague and Roche 2012d) (Roche & Teague 2012b). Line managers have an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflict within organisations. However, the devolution of people management can bring difficulties as senior management and line managers may have differing views on who should have HR responsibilities (Teague and Roche 2012d). However, the delegation of people management functions to line managers, and the centralisation of the senior HR managers role is critical if senior managers are to have a stronger strategic HRM role in an organisation (Teague and Roche 2012d) (Currie et al 2016).

The use of line managers to resolve conflict may form part of an organisations attempt to resolve conflict informally (Currie et al 2016). However, line managers may have a role to play in preventing the occurrence of conflict in the first place, their role may also involve resolving conflict, before it escalates. The process of “sense-making” is an important skill of line managers, where they can gauge the emotions and behaviours of their team to encourage an environment of trust and cooperation (Currie et al 2016), this may mean that employees are less likely to create conflict, interpersonally, or with their employer, or that, where conflict does occur, they will look to their managers to resolve this.

The role of line managers has been shown to be most effective in a coaching and mentoring role, where they can interact with their teams to ensure they receive appropriate development in their roles (CIPD 2008a). As line managers become important participants in the management of conflict in organisations, they must also be able to identify problems as they develop and act quickly to diffuse tensions, to ensure they don’t escalate in to more serious and potentially damaging conflict (CIPD 2008a), this problem-solving approach ensures employers, and employees alike have less recourse to formal procedures (Currie et al 2016).

The way in which a line manager performs conflict management responsibilities can depend on their approach to the situation, their natural style of handling conflict and also the training that they have received. Rahim (1983) discussed the conflict management styles of managers in the development of “Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II)” which measured the styles as “Integrating”, “Obliging”, “Dominating”, “Avoiding”, and “Compromising” (Rahim 1983), these were based on the five styles developed by Blake and Mouton in 1964 (Callanan and Perri 2006). These styles were also expanded upon by Thomas and Kilmann in 1974 (Callanan and Perri 2006) in the construction of their measure of the five styles, “Accommodating”, “Avoiding”, “Competing”, “Collaborating” and “Compromising” (Kilmann, R.H. and Thomas (n.d.)). A scenario-based approach to the training of line managers has been found to be effective (Callanan and Perri 2006), using this approach involves the identification of the managers preferred conflict management style. Line managers can then look at utilising this style in conflict scenarios. Of course, to be as effective as possible, they must be able to adapt their style based on the situation.

In a 2008 CIPD survey report, “51% of Irish employees” stated that they had conflict management training (CIPD, 2008c), however, in most cases, this may be limited to training and coaching in grievance and disciplinary procedures only (Teague and Roche 2012). In order to perform a conflict management role effectively, line managers must receive proper training, this training may be

focused on developing the interpersonal skills of the manager; fundamentally they must have strong communication and listening skills, as well as the ability to review all possible solutions in order to problem-solve, they must also be able to garner the trust on both sides (Whittaker and Marchington 2003).

Formal appraisal of the way in which line managers perform their conflict management role is important for future role development and feedback. It has also been found that very few organisations formally appraise line managers on internal conflict resolution (Ksenia Zheltoukhova and CIPD 2013) (Teague and Roche 2012d). It must also be considered that not all managers have the core competence to manage conflict, or even manage people (Saundry et al 2016).

Line managers must also be able to identify the types of conflict that they can successfully deal with, and that which must be escalated further up the chain (Costantino and Merchant 1996) (Teague and Roche 2012d). This may have important implications for the organisation in complex cases, for example bullying or harassment, where line managers must be familiar with the organisational procedures in place, understand the issues involved, or seek the advice of a member of HR, so they are clear where their role should be.

However, a number of CIPD studies have shown that line managers do not always follow organisational policies related to people management and so their ability to adhere to conflict management procedures may be inhibited (CIPD 2008a, b, c). There must be procedures in place to hold line managers fully accountable for solving problems informally (Teague et al 2015).

Line managers may also view their HR role as secondary to their operational tasks (Currie et al 2016). Although they may be formally enabled, trained and appraised on their HR responsibilities, they may not have the same motivation, the same outlook, or confidence to manage conflict as those who specifically manage HR, so their usefulness may be limited. Along with a lack of confidence to manage the issues, they may fear repercussions if their management of the conflict is not successful (Latreille 2011). On the other hand, significant causes of conflict in the workplace can stem from employees in conflict with their line manager, especially at a time where line managers are under pressure to achieve strong performances from their teams.

The training of employees in the organisational grievance procedures and the use of a formal open-door policy, can ensure that employees can take their grievance higher up in the management chain, should they need to.

There has yet to be evidence forthcoming that utilising line managers, who may have little problem-solving or conflict management skills is an adequate response to a requirement for an optimal conflict management system (Teague et al 2015).

The use of line managers plays a key part in the pro-active management of conflict and this and the utilisation of forms of “commitment-orientated HRM” is central to high performance work systems in organisations. In a high performance work system (HIWS), conflict must be settled efficiently, or it may derail the organisationsl objectives (Lipsky and Avgar 2004).

High performance work systems –

Colvin (2013) found that the adoption of high performance work systems (HIWS) was found to produce lower levels of workplace conflict, “High levels of employee involvement are associated with less workplace conflict and lowering of dispute resolution activity” (Colvin 2013, p-277);. in a HIWS, there is a greater trust and cooperation between employees and their employer, more employee participation, and training of employees (Colvin 2003). In self-managed teams, disputes may be resolved informally in all, or most, situations. However, the level of conflict in these organisations may be at similar levels to other organisations, the grievance rate is reduced as it is a function of how

“disputes are being resolved” (Colvin 2003, p-734) The research has posited though that employees who do lodge grievances in these types of organisations may be thought of as less of a team player, and this could have implications for whether employees are comfortable to bring a grievance internally, or seek to have it resolved externally (Colvin 2013). In essence, the process of resolving grievances informally can have implications beyond the grievance itself, and could have significant implications for grievances that are not resolved (in the employees eyes) utilising clear procedures, as grievances may fester and eventually, the employee may exit the organisation, or take their case externally.

Socialisation of conflict –

The organisational culture of the workplace also has a role to play in levels of conflict, and how organisations deal with conflict, many HR managers do not rate ADR mechanisms preferring to focus on employee commitment and engagement as a way of reducing conflict in their organisations (Teague et al 2015). Employers may try to “socialise” conflict out of the workplace by utilising a range of employee engagement methods. This can be useful for creating a culture of engagement and driving performance, however, conflict can occur for a number of reasons, not directly related to employees or to the organisational culture of the workplace

Conclusion –

Although the literature describes the reluctance of HR managers to adopt alternative or innovative dispute approaches, it is clear that not all employees are utilising the procedures already in place, and are instead taking their cases externally. The adoption of ADR practices, or a conflict management system can provide benefits in terms of cost and time, however, there a number of prerequisites that must be adhered to; senior management must be committed; employees may participate in the design of the system; the processes should be triggered early, before tempers are frayed; the organisation must provide due process provisions in order to maintain the integrity of the system (Teague 2005). As for all conflict resolution procedures, management must be prepared to monitor their effectiveness to ensure similar disputes are avoided. Furthermore, although many of these practices (mediation in particular) now have widespread use, there is still not yet consensus on what constitutes ADR. The Irish Law Reform Commission, in its report on ADR in 2010, quoted the Australian National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council, “The inconsistent use of both ADR terminology and principles potentially affects consumers, referrers, evaluators, researchers, policy makers, courts and tribunals, all of whom need consistent and accurate information on ADR. As a result, it is likely that many disputes that could effectively be resolved through ADR are litigated in the courts and tribunals” (Law Reform Comission 2010). Although there is now widespread use of ADR mechanisms in the judicial system for employment dispute resolution, coverage remains low within organisations.

Line managers play a crucial role in recognising conflict as it begins, and taking steps to prevent it escalating, however, effective conflict management training for line managers is not always present, and they may not be aware of or have the motivation to follow the procedures already in place.

The literature reports that there is not yet one approach to workplace dispute resolution that can be considered above all others, in all scenarios, as each situation demands that the facts of the case; legal rights; and the power of each participant; must be examined in deciding the strategy (Lytle et al 1999).

Chapter 3 - Research problem and aims of research:

Following the review of the literature in chapter 2, a number of research questions were formulated. A number of sub-objectives were identified from these questions, and three hypotheses were formed, in order to investigate the use of conflict management practices, the effectiveness of the different types, the role of line managers, and any innovations used in conflict mechanism.

Objective:

To investigate the types and effectiveness of conflict management practices in use by Irish employers

Sub-objectives:

To investigate the types of conflict management practices in use in SME's in Ireland

To examine the effectiveness of the most popular conflict management practices

To understand the role of line managers as the first step in resolving and managing conflict

To explore the use of alternative methods of dispute resolution as a means of resolving workplace conflict

Research questions –

What types conflict management systems are in use in employers in Ireland?

Do those working in conflict management have a preference for traditional methods over alternative methods?

What is the breadth of use of alternative methods of dispute resolution as a means of resolving conflict in Ireland?

Why do organisations choose one style over another?

Do employers perceive mediation to be effective in conflict resolution?

What is the line manager's role in preventing conflict from escalating?

Are line managers prepared adequately for their role in conflict management?

Research Hypotheses –

The grievance or dispute rate will be positively influenced by the use of formal or interest-based/preventative conflict management practices

Organisations are devolving conflict resolution processes to line managers, however, line managers are not formally trained or only trained in company grievance and disciplinary procedures.

3. Organisations do not use innovative techniques in relation to conflict management

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology:

Introduction -

The motivation behind this study is to understand the approaches to conflict management in use by Irish small and medium enterprises, and to investigate the use of pro-active and innovative approaches to conflict resolution, with a particular focus on mediation. The study also examines the role of line managers and how they contribute to the resolution of conflict in the workplace.

Secondary research –

The literature review looked at the current body of research in to conflict management, including the reasons purported to be behind the increase in incidences of individual conflict (as opposed to collective conflict). The review identified the processes in place for resolving conflict in the workplace, and the relatively new focus on, and the benefits of, the Alternative Dispute Resolution processes. The research also examined the use of innovative processes for resolving workplace conflict. The review of the literature has also looked at the role of line managers in preventing conflict.

Primary research –

As discussed in the literature review, conflict is very often the result of personality clashes, and most often occurs with an employees colleagues or line manager. The research focused on the specific conflict resolution mechanisms adopted by the organisations sampled, including the use of formal processes, and alternative methods, such as mediation. The research also delved in to the reasons why organisations adopt the conflict resolution approaches that they do. The adoption of specific commitment-orientated HRM practices has been shown to affect the rate of conflict in organisations and the research sought to examine the use of these practices amongst the organisations sampled. Line managers are best placed to see conflict developing amongst their team, and they should be armed with appropriate training and the leadership expertise to recognise this and deal with it at source. The research examined the role of line managers and whether they are indeed capable of managing conflict; including, whether they have the right tools, to be a key part of this process.

Research Philosophy –

Ontology is concerned with the “nature of reality” (Saunders et al 2016,page-127) , or the “character of the world as it actually is” (Hall, 2003). In determining the research methodology for the research questions, it has been determined to take an objectivist or deductive view. The aims of the research support a deductive philosophy as it seeks to understand the ways in which workplaces perform in conflict situations (Saunders et al 2016). Epistemology relates to “assumptions about knowledge” (Saunders et al 2016,page-127). The quantitative nature of this research supports a “positivist” philosophy; as it seeks to explain the processes use for conflict resolution, and give an objective view of their effectiveness. However, although the research is based on existing theory, and hypotheses have been constructed. However, as part of the analysis will focus on explaining the results, rather than inferring a statistical relationship, we will adopt of “critical realism” (Saunders et al2016,pgage-128) philosophy for this part of the research. In this respect, the research will adopt a pragmatic stance; where the research aims to identify appropriate conflict practices from a practical perspective (Saunders et al 2016).

Axiology refers to the choice of research methodology and how it is affected by the values and ethics that are important to each individual researcher (Saunders et al2016). The “research onion” in Figure 1 (Saunders et al 2012), describes the way in which the research methodology is chosen, having regard to the objective of data collection and analysis.

In order to determine the most appropriate research methodology, consideration must also be given to how the ontology influences our objectives, as the research chosen here is a quantitative examination of the “facts”, the “objectivist” or “realist” (Saunders et al 2016) ontology fits in with these objectives. This assumes that the social and natural structures of the world already exist, and as researchers, we just need to find them and describe them.

Research paradigm –

The paradigm that has been used to investigate the mechanisms of conflict resolution is situated within the “functional paradigm” (Saunders 2016, page-132); that is the research is seeking to make a rational explanation for the research objectives, although, the research is not seeking to explain why organisation adopt the practices that they do.

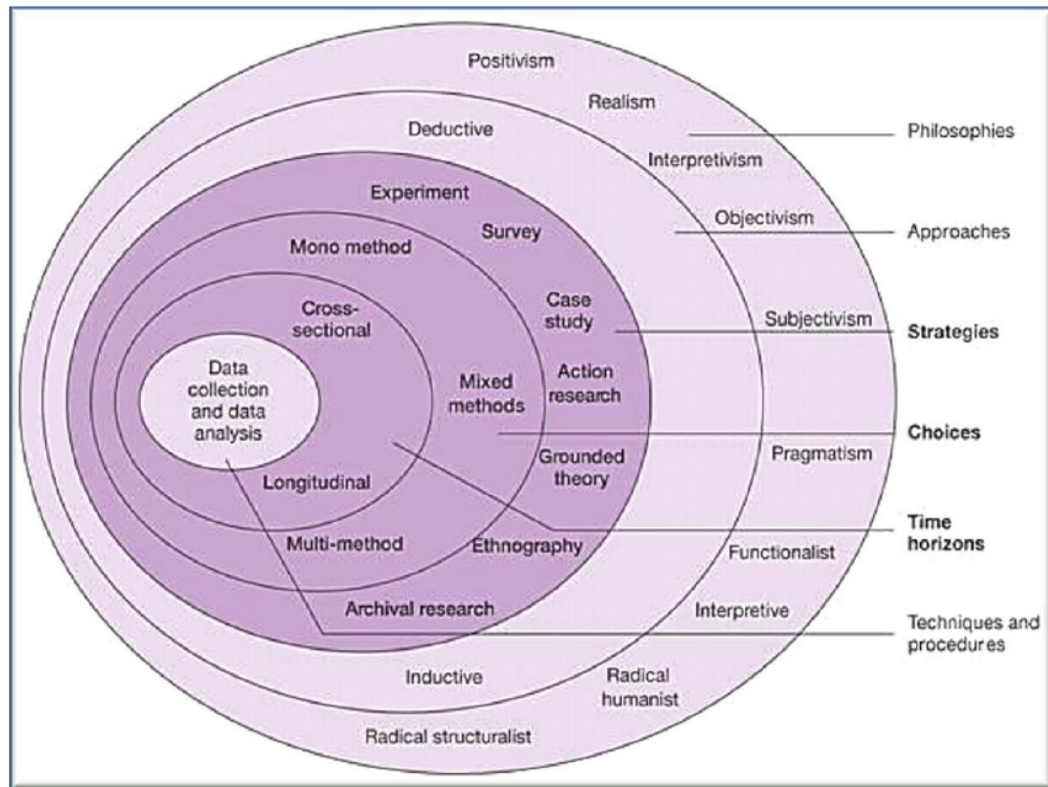


Figure 1 - The research onion
(Saunders et al 2012)

Research method –

The questionnaire method lends itself to the research objectives of this study; as it seeks to research the types of conflict management strategies in use by Irish organisations, their effectiveness, based on organisational outcomes, as well as the role of line managers. The objective of this research is to describe the conflict management practices in use in Irish organisations. The research also seeks to analyse the effectiveness of these conflict management practices, in this way, the research concerns descriptive and explanatory research (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill 2016). Teague and Roche (2012) adopted this survey method to investigate the same constructs under investigation in this survey. However, as noted, there are very few empirical research methods used on the subject of conflict management in the HRM literature (Roche and Teague 2012a). Therefore, this research aims to further the knowledge on conflict resolution within Irish organisations. It was determined to carry out this research using a the questionnaire method by way of a web survey, as this allows for efficient construction of the survey, and assigning of coding, and also efficient distribution and collection of data.

Following the review of the literature, a number of objectives and sub-objectives were formed, which informed the research questions to be answered. Three hypotheses were formed from the research, Hypothesis 1 aims to show that the use of interest-based/preventative conflict management procedures will have a positive effect on the number of grievances that the organisation experiences;

measured the grievance rate. This hypothesis can also be examined against the rate of workplace conflict in the organisation, in terms of the number of grievances and disputes handled externally to the organisation.

The research objectives also seek to understand the use of line manager's as agents in conflict management, and the survey method can capture the instances of this in a large number of organisations; in order to confirm or deny hypothesis 2, which hypothesised that line manager's are being utilised in conflict within organisations, however, they were not receiving sufficient training. A previous study by Teague and Roche (2012) in the sectors of manufacturing, construction and distribution, found that line managers were being utilised within conflict management systems, but that this was "without formal training or recurrent assessment of their competence" (Teague & Roche 2012, p-248). A third hypothesis examines the use of innovative techniques in relation to conflict management, and investigates whether organisations are utilising innovative techniques. The research objectives posed a number of questions and sub-objectives, of which, the hypotheses above were formulated from the research. The research aims to infer a relationship between variables in the research in order to contribute to the research on conflict resolution. However, no causal relationship will be deemed to exist between these variables.

There also remain sub-objectives that will be explained descriptively, and from which no correlation relationship can be inferred. In these cases, one or more variables is examined to investigate and analyse the survey results in relation to the research objectives, these include; the types of conflict management practices that are currently in surveyed organisations at present; the breadth of use of alternative resolution practices; the preference for commitment-orientated HR practices and the implementation of any innovative conflict resolution practices within organisations and the themes that these fall under. The reasons why organisations choose one mechanism over another will also be explored. Accordingly, the results of the research survey will be analysed descriptively and analytically in order describe the results and to infer a relationship between the variables (Groves 2009).

As the research is concerned with establishing a relationship between numbers of variables, it has been concluded that a quantitative approach will best suit to examine the constructs under investigation. In order to make inferences about the research, a large sample size was preferable, as this allows inferences to be made relative to the population as a whole. The research also aims to explore the use of innovations in relation to conflict management, of which no theories have been hypothesised.

The research was carried out over a timeframe of two months; it was anticipated that this timeframe was realistic given the nature of the survey method and the immediacy of the survey distribution.

Research Design –

The research methodology chosen for this research was a questionnaire, by way of a survey. The research was carried out using a validated questionnaire by kind permission of Professor Paul Teague (Queen's University Belfast). The survey used was initially carried out in 2008, and was constructed by a team of researchers from University College Dublin and Queen's University, Belfast. As the research objectives also aimed to examine the instances of innovation in conflict resolution, and also, the use of mediation (other than through the Workplace Relations Commission), questions were added which required respondents to provide answers in the form of text. These questions sought factual information on the use of these different practices. A number of questions in the survey had logic, which means that they were only answered when another question was also answered, for example, those employers that had not used mediation, did not answer the questions following this.

The research will be cross-sectional in nature. This means that this research assumes no time dimension, the research is conducted based on differences within the research sample without intervention, and the sample for the research was not chosen randomly. The research is concerned with measuring the organisations only at this point in time, and it is not focused longitudinally over time. Although causal inferences cannot be concluded, estimates can be made as the sample is taken from the wider population concerned with the research. As the research is conducted at one time, if the research were to be repeated at another point in time, the results may indeed differ. Unlike experimental or longitudinal research, it is not possible to ‘follow-up’ with the organisations, to track the changes based on time. The organisations included in the research are chosen because of their similarity; in order to provide assumptions that can be applied to the population, however, they must also have slight differences in order for the variables to be compared.

Reliability assessment –

Validity refers to “the extent to which the survey measures accurately the intended construct” (Groves 2009,page-274), reliability is the measure of “variability of answers of repeated conceptual trials” (Groves 2009,page-281). As the reliability and validity of this survey had already been tested, it was suitable for use in this research. In order to for a survey to be reliable, the questions must perfectly reflect the constructs that are being measured (Groves 2009).

The reliability assessment was measured by way of Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability of a scale measures the extent to which the responses to the items in a scale correlate with the total score. This gives an estimate of the way in which the items in a scale measure the same construct or information (Groves 2009). A Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 or higher is acceptable. Each of the constructs in the survey was measured for their internal consistency. The reliability analysis for each of the scales used is shown in the next chapter. The reliability assessments were in line with those from the source literature (Roche and Teague 2012a) (Teague and Roche 2012).

Limitations –

There are several limitations to the study, most relevant being the response rate of the sample; the data is limited to a small number of individuals and organisations, therefore, the research cannot be generalised to the wider population. The low response rate that was difficult to control in a web-based survey.

Research approach –

In reviewing the literature, it was noted that there are few empirical studies on conflict resolution in the workplace outside of the United States. The majority of the HRM literature on conflict is descriptive (Roche and Teague 2012a). The HRM literature has a common theme; that conflict is a problem for organisations, but there is not yet agreement on the best way to manage it (Currie et al 2016). Previous research by Roche and Teague (2012 a, b) examined conflict resolution in the Irish workplace; in the context of conflict management systems and the role of line managers, and it is this research which has informed the choice of research method. The research by Roche and Teague was carried out in 2008 on semi-state organisations in the construction, manufacturing and distribution industries.

Although the current research does not go in to detail as to why organisations are or, are not, pursuing alternative methods of conflict resolution, it does provide information on the reasons that organisations attribute to their choice of dispute resolution strategy. This has important implications as organisations seek to formulate a conflict resolution strategy that is aligned to the strategic HR objectives of the organisation, while also providing fairness of procedure for employee's.

Population and Sampling –

Identification of target population -

The population for the research was initially defined as focusing on organisations in the retail sector, operating within the Republic of Ireland. The target population consist of those respondents for which the researcher wants to “make inferences with the research statistics” (Groves 2009,page-69), however, the survey population consisted of those organisations accessible to the researcher (Groves 2009). The retail sector was chosen as it was felt that there are particular factors that are unique to this sector. These include, the strength of the workforce; Retail Excellence Ireland (2016) in their Budget Submission for Budget 2017 (Retail Excellence Ireland 2016), reported that retail is the largest private industry employer in Ireland, with an estimated workforce of 280,000; the transient nature of the workforce, which means that organisations must continually adapt their processes to account for the relatively high turnover rate, and the variation between workplaces that employ those that are unionized, and those that are not. The retail industry was also chosen due to the high reliance on people management, due to the nature of retail teams, they are often slightly removed from their organisational headquarters.

Research sample –

The sample frame was selected as the retail employers within Ireland. Within this frame, the member organisations of Retail Excellence Ireland were chosen to provide the organisations for the sample, as this afforded the opportunity to sample a large number of retail organisations operating within the Republic of Ireland. The large number of member organisations allowed access to a wide range of employers and it was envisaged that the sampling of such a large number would at least provide a response large enough to enable a generalization of the results to the wider retail population. The target respondent was the person who manages, or looks after HR, within the sampled organisations.

Sample size –

An objective of the research was to achieve a sample size of 160 organisations; this would have yielded a margin of error of 8%. The response rate achieved was much lower than this for a number of reasons; this leads to the assumption that the results suffer from non-response bias, which is when the results differ from those that would be expected if the whole sample size were measured (Groves 2009). There will always be a risk of non-response bias as it's very unlikely that any survey will achieve a 100% response rate.

Table 1 - Indicative margin of error (ME) for percentages estimated on samples of different sizes (95% confidence interval)

(Watson 2008)

<i>Sample size</i>	<i>Margin of error</i>
20	21.9%
40	15.5%
50	13.9%
60	12.7%
70	11.7%
80	11.0%
90	10.3%
100	9.8%
150	8.0%
200	6.9%
250	6.2%
300	5.7%
350	5.2%
400	4.9%
450	4.6%
500	4.4%
550	4.2%
600	4.0%
700	3.7%
800	3.5%
850	3.4%
900	3.3%

Note: Assuming simple random sample and sample percentage of 50%. For sample percentages greater or less than 50% M.E. is lower.

Sampling technique –

The research method consisted of self-selection sampling; participants were emailed the survey, and they chose whether to respond, however, the survey also adopted convenience sampling in order to increase the number of responses. Participants were selected based on the availability of their HR departments email addresses on the Internet. However, of course, they still choose to participate themselves.

Retail Excellence Ireland (REI), who included the survey link in their membership email update, facilitated the distribution of the survey to the target sample. REI have 1,320 member companies within the Republic of Ireland, representing some 13,500 retail stores (Retail Excellence Ireland 2016). The use of REI to distribute the survey link allowed a large number of the target employers to be accessed conveniently. The distribution of the survey link by email also allowed for a high sample to be reached within a short space of time. Nevertheless, distribution of an online survey by a non-specialist third party has its limitations; it does not allow the opportunity for adequate follow-up on behalf of the researcher (Saunders et al 2016) and as in this case, if it is sent within a wider email update, it may be missed.

Response rate -

In the case of this initial sample, only six responses were achieved. While the reasons for this may be varied, it is proposed that there may be a few main reasons for this low response rate, and specific to this survey, the time of year that the survey was sent; mid-Summer is a time when employees are very often away on annual leave. In examining the reasons for the low response to this survey, a number of factors must be considered, for example, the survey may not have reached participants, for example, due to spam filters or those who received the email may not have wanted to participate.

Low or non-response to surveys is one factor that must be overcome in order to achieve a satisfactory response rate such that the research outcomes can be generalised to the wider population. In order to achieve a higher response to this survey, the researcher identified a number of organisations that were in the original sample, and followed up with these by separate personal email with the survey link, and a further 10 responses were achieved. It was not possible to follow-up with each of the original sample organisations due to access restrictions; the research was not party to the original sample list.

Further to this, the researcher widened the scope of the organisations involved in the research, to include 'Services', 'Manufacturing', 'Utilities' and 'Finance'.

The researcher targeted further organisations directly by personal email. A further 14 responses were achieved. A further 55 organisations were sampled after the initial sample. It is not possible to give an accurate response rate for the follow-up and new sampling, as some of the organisations targeted may have been sent the survey initially.

However, it could be postulated that, of the organisations sampled separately, the email was sent directly to the HR departments, whereas the original mailshot email may have been sent to a general person within the organisations, so the second sampling may have been more targeted to the person responsible for conflict management. However, this is an assumption, and cannot be confirmed. Of the 55 organisations emailed separately, there is a response rate of 43%. This aligns with previous experience that demonstrates that personalised communication and follow-up are necessary to ensure satisfactory response rates for surveys. The researcher also investigated other reasons for the low response rate, including the fall off rate, where a respondent may complete some of the survey, but not finish it (Groves 2009), and the fall-off reported indicated that one respondent had not completed the full survey.

Data Collection –

Research Instrument –

The survey was constructed and administered online, via Survey Gizmo. A definition of workplace conflict as well as respondent instructions was included at the head of the questionnaire. The introduction to the survey also confirmed to participants that all responses would be kept confidential, and that the survey was anonymous. The survey was expected to take between 5-8 minutes to complete; depending on the questions answered.

Survey pilot -

The survey was piloted on 3 people, on the basis of their comments; some elements of the survey were clarified. In question 5, following feedback, the question options were clarified in brackets at the end. One of participants in the pilot survey was chosen for their considerable experience of HRM practices and the conflict resolution practices in use in organisations, and externally. The other two pilot survey participants were chosen in order to test that the question construction was meaningful to them. These pilot survey participants were closely linked to the sampling frame. Following supervisor feedback, question 30 was updated and changed to bring it in line with the current employment law legislation and structures in place. The final survey consisted of 31 questions, covering conflict management practices in use, HR and industrial relations practices, and other features of organisations, including the use of innovative practices in conflict management, and the use of mediation.

Alternative research instruments –

Alternative methods for research were considered in designing the research method for this study. The methods considered included qualitative methods for example, interviews; case studies; focus groups, as well as action research, involving training of employee's and feedback involving questionnaires.

In 2015, Teague, Roche, Gormley and Currie performed a qualitative study, utilising a variety of methods, including case studies and focus groups in which they examined the incidence of alternative resolution practices in Irish organisations and the reasons behind their uptake. In their case studies, they examined alternative and innovative methods used by a select group of organisations operating in Ireland. This was an in depth study which provided detailed information on the organisations in question, and also provided useful research on the HR practices adopted by a range of Irish workplaces (Teague et al 2015).

Data Analysis –

Coding -

All variables were coded on setting up the questionnaire, the use of coding serves to provide a numeric value to the question data to assist in statistical analysis (Groves 2009). The survey utilised three Likert scales that were coded, from 1-4 along a scale from “strongly agree” “agree” “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. One Likert scale was coded 1-5 for “significantly below average” “below average” “about average” “above average” and “significantly above average”. One scale was code from 1-4 for options of 0 conflict, 1, 2 and 5+.

Variables were code 1 or 2, for “yes” or “no” questions. There survey utilised a number of checkbox questions, and these were coded from the number 1, finishing with the number of boxes in the question. All variables in all questions were coded, including questions for not applicable “N/A”.

The data was analysed using Survey Gizmo. All questions were added to a report that showed the responses to each question including number of responses, percentages, and including statistical reporting, of the mean and standard deviation. In addition, cross-tab reports and comparison reports were produced, these reports were used describe the results obtained, and to infer relationships between variables.

Operationalization –

The data generated by the survey was nominal in nature, that is the data simply counted number of occurrences, and there was no ranking of the data (Saunders et al 2016). A demographic variable was introduced in to the survey to ensure that only those employed by organisations based within Ireland were participants in the survey, this introduced sampling bias, which means that some members of the sampling frame were not given a chance to participate (Groves 2009).

This was to ensure that only those organisations that were based in Ireland participated. A number of other dependent variables were a part of the survey, including the main business activity of the organisation; company size; business type, e.g. private company, franchise, semi-state etc. and the number of employees.

Variable Selection –

The results from the survey were used to answer a number of research questions, including, the types of conflict management practices in use in the organisations studied, in order to analyse this question, the responses from two checkbox-style questions were analysed to determine the percentage use of a number of conflict resolution practices for individual and collective conflict. The results were further analysed to provide answers to the other research questions, hypothesis 1 aims to investigate the effectiveness of the conflict resolution practices in use, hypothesis 2 aims to investigate the role of line managers and their training. Hypothesis 3 examines the use of innovative methods of conflict resolution.

In order to analysis hypothesis 1, the dependent variable was selected as “the company’s experiences too many grievances or disputes” and the independent variables were chosen as the conflict management practices in use by the organisation. A comparison was performed on Survey Gizmo that analysed the conflict management practices chosen by those respondents that also said that they “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the statement, “the company experiences too many grievances or disputes”. The responses were tabulated and the percentages reported described the relationship between the two variables.

An analysis of hypothesis 2 was performed by analysing the results from one Likert scale against the results from a set of checkboxes. The first scale asked participants to answer the following questions, “Line managers and supervisors are formally trained to handle conflict”, “Line managers and supervisors are expected to conduct regular face-to-face meetings with employees to gauge areas of concern to them and resolve problems”, “Line managers and supervisors’ competence in employee relations is specifically assessed when their own performance is appraised”, ”Line managers and supervisors are specifically and formally enabled to resolve employee problems quickly and informally whenever possible” and In practice, line managers and supervisors lack the confidence to resolve workplace conflict and rely on HR managers or senior managers”.

The second question has the following responses, “Training in company grievance and disciplinary procedures only”, “Formal conflict management training”, “Coaching on conflict management techniques” and “Line managers and supervisors do not receive training in conflict management techniques”. The results of these scales were analysed and relationships were inferred in order to investigate hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 postulates that organisations are not using innovative techniques in conflict management. The investigation of this hypothesis involved measuring the type of conflict management practices adopted by the organisations studied and analysing them in relation to the total sample, the percentage values were used to report the results of this hypothesis.

Ethical considerations –

The researcher endeavours to remain ethical at all times, in order to maintain the integrity and objectivity of the researcher and respect for others. The researcher acknowledges the privacy of those taking part, and the voluntary nature of the research. The researcher will ensure that all participants are provided with thorough information on the study, and give their informed consent, and their anonymity is respected. The data gathered during the study will be confidential and held responsibly in accordance with the principles of data protection.

Chapter 5 - Findings and Analysis –

5.1 Introduction –

This chapter reveals the analysis and findings of a survey on conflict resolution practices, which was carried out on organisations within the areas of retail, services, manufacturing, finance and utilities in Ireland. A description of how the research was carried out is set out in chapter 4. The research data was analysed in order to investigate the answers to a number of research objectives. Furthermore, the data was analysed to investigate three research hypotheses. A number of sub-objectives of the research were constructed from the research question, this chapter will analyse the results in order to investigate the answers to each of the research questions.

Cronbach's Alpha –

Results presented in Table 8 -

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.654	.659	5

Results presented in Figure 2

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.654	.659	5

5.2 Survey questions -

5.2.1 Investigation of the types of conflict management practise in use by Irish small and medium enterprises –

Table 2 presents the results for the incidences of conflict management practices amongst individual employees. The use of formal procedures involving progressively higher levels of management, are used in the majority of organisations (82.1%). This correlates with the literature, and the importance of clear procedures for employees, to incorporate due process protections, and procedural fairness

The numbers of interest-based practices, including preventative measures for reducing conflict, are used less, with just over half of respondents (57.1%) utilising a formal open-door policy. This finding supports the research in previous literature (Roche and Teague 2012a) (Teague et al 2015), as it has previously been found that a formal open-door policy is a common addition to an

employers preventative measures for reducing conflict. The use of an employee 'hotline' or email-based speak up service is used by 21.4% of those surveyed, and 17.9% have utilised employee advocates. The rates of these practices are higher than previous research (Roche and Teague 2012a) . Employers who have brought in external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court) were 21.4% of those surveyed. The results for manager and employee review panels were negligible at 3.6%. A surprising finding in the research is that 32.1% of those surveyed claim to not operate formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures, preferring to resolve employee grievances informally, utilising measures as they appear warranted in the circumstances. This is surprising given the propensity of the Irish state agencies to penalise employers if they do not have procedures in place.

Turning to practices aimed at reducing conflict in collective conflict, the results of which are detailed in Table 3, again the rate of use of formal dispute procedures with progressively higher levels of management, is 78.6%, which is higher than the results of this study in 2012 (Roche and Teague 2012a). It has been noted previously, that in a collective conflict situation, there are more interest-based practices in used, compared to conflict involving individual employees (Roche and Teague 2011). The results of this research indicate that this is still the case, 'Brainstorming', problem solving and related techniques are used in 28.6% of employers, the use of formal ('win-win') bargaining techniques are utilised in 21.4% of cases and the use of intensive formal communication

regarding impending change with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony and conflict is seen in 39.3% of cases. In collective conflict, the use of external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court), which can be termed “assisted negotiations” is utilised in 35.7% of cases. Other than formal dispute resolution procedures, employers are also utilising the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court in a rights-based practice where deadlock remains, which is 25%, and the use of external adjudicators (other than the WRC or Labour Court) has been used in 14.3% of cases. An equally surprising finding, as for the practices involving individual employees, is the claim that 35.7% of employers are not utilising formal procedures, and are instead resolving disputes using techniques appropriate at the time.

5.2.2 Preference for traditional methods or alternative methods -

The results for this question are presented in Tables 2 and 3. It is salient to note the use of formal procedures for conflict resolution, but also the absence of procedures in such a high amount of cases. As noted previously, there is more use of a variety of interest-based practices in collective situations.

The findings indicate that over 78% of employers are using traditional methods of dispute resolution, in the form of formal procedures. We can also see from the findings, especially in relation to individual disputes that, while a number of employers are utilising preventative conflict management practices, such as a formal open-door policy, an employee ‘hotline’ or email-based ‘speak up

service' and employee advocates, these results are much lower than for formal procedures. Corresponding with the literature, it can be seen that there is a much greater range of practices used by those resolving collective conflict, however, as with the individual results, these are being used in only a small number of employers.

5.2.3 Research Hypotheses -

Hypothesis 1- the grievance or dispute rate of the organisation will be positively influenced by the use of formal or interest-based conflict management practices

In order to test hypothesis 1, the respondents answers to the question “The company experiences too many grievances or disputes”, which was measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, was an independent variable, and was compared with responses to questions measuring the conflict management and resolution practices used by the respondent organisations. The practices that were used as dependent variables were, responding to the expanding body of legislation providing employees with individual employment rights; expediting conflict resolution and/or resolving conflict in-house; formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures involving progressively higher levels of management in resolving disputes; use of external experts (other than Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court); use of a formal open-door policy; use of an employee ‘hotline’ or email-based speak-up service; use of employee advocates; use of review panels

comprised of manager's; use of company ombudsperson; use of review panels comprised of employees peers. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 for individual grievances and Table 5 for group or collective conflict. . The results are clear-cut, survey respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The Company experiences too many grievances or disputes" also utilised a range of conflict management and conflict resolution practices.

In relation to the respondents who prioritised responding to the expanding body of legislation providing employees with individual employment rights, over 32% disagreed and 28% strongly disagreed with the statement that the organisation had too many grievances or disputes, of the respondents who prioritised expediting the resolution of conflict, or resolving it in-house, 39% disagreed and 42% strongly disagreed with the statement that they had too many grievances. Organisations that utilise formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures, 35% disagreed and 35% strongly disagreed (individual conflict) and 32% disagreed and 35% strongly disagreed (group conflict), other significant results for individual conflict management practices involved the use of a formal open-door policy, where 28% disagreed and 21% strongly disagreed that the organisation experienced too many grievances and disputes. In relation to group conflict, the use of external experts, 17% disagreed and 17% strongly disagreed; of those who resorted at the final stage, where deadlock remains, to the WRC or Labour Court, 10% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed; those who have utilised 'brainstorming' problem-solving techniques to solve problems or

disputes, 10% disagreed and 17% strongly disagreed; and those organisations that utilised intensive formal communication regarding impending change with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony and conflict, 25% disagreed and 10% disagreed. These results indicate that organisations that utilise conflict management practices, and mechanisms of conflict resolution have less grievances. This confirms hypothesis 1, that grievance or dispute rates of the organisation will be positively influenced by the use of formal and interest-based/preventative conflict management practices.

In order to examine this hypothesis further, the numbers of instances where external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court) were involved in resolving disputes during the past year was compared with a range of conflict resolution practices as above, and the results compared. The results are presented in Tables 6 and 7. For those companies that use formal grievance and dispute procedures, 53.57% (individual disputes) and also 53.57% in collective conflicts situations has 0 disputes where external experts were used in the last year (and these were the only significant results). For those who utilised various methods of interest-based practices or preventative practices, the majority in all cases had 0 disputes, or one dispute. This was also the case for collective practices. These results indicate that organisations that utilise procedures, be they formal or interest-based/preventative have very low or insignificant grievance rates.

Hypothesis 2 - Organisations are devolving conflict resolution processes to line managers, however, line managers are not formally trained or only trained in company grievance and disciplinary procedures

In order to test hypothesis 2, the results of a 4-point Likert scale measuring the involvement of line managers in conflict management was compared to the results of a series of question that measured the amount of conflict management training received by line managers.

The results for the Likert scale are presented Figure 2. In response to the question “Line managers and supervisors are formally trained to handle conflict”, 39.3% of respondents either strongly agreed (14.3%) or agreed (25), while 60.8% of respondents either strongly disagreed (42.9%) or disagreed (17.9%). For the question “Line managers and supervisors are required to conduct regular face-to-face meetings with employees to gauge areas of concern and resolve problems”, the results were 78% either strongly agreed (35.7%) or agreed (42.9%) and 21.4% disagreed. The results for the question, “Line managers and supervisors competence in employee relations is specifically assessed when their own performance is appraised, 39.3% agreed, and 60.8% either strongly disagreed (17.9%) or disagreed (42.9%). 67.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Line managers or supervisors are formally enabled to resolve grievances, and 32.1% disagreed.

The last question, “In practice line managers and supervisors lack the confidence to resolve workplace grievances and rely on HR managers or senior managers”, 82.1% either strongly agreed or agreed and 17.5% either strongly disagreed or disagreed.

In order to measure the training given to line managers in relation to conflict, 40.7% of respondents stated that line managers receive training in grievance and disciplinary procedures only, 44.4% said that line managers do not receive training in conflict management techniques, 25.9% receive coaching in conflict management techniques and 11.1% receive formal conflict management training.

Hypothesis 3 - Organisations do not use innovative techniques in relation to conflict management

The results of the survey indicate that organisations are not using innovative techniques in their organisational dispute resolution. The results are presented in Figure 3, and it is clear, 85.7% of respondents have not used innovative techniques. The respondents that answered yes for this question, also provided open text answers and the themes identified in these were “mediation” “in-house’ mediation “mediation training for managers” “focus groups for conflict issues” “quarterly staff forums”.

However, another part of the survey objectives was to analyse the effect of mediation, Figure 4 indicates the use of mediation, and the results are nearly 50-50, 57.1% of respondents have used mediation and 42.9% have not used mediation to resolve workplace disputes.

Peripheral findings -

There were a number of peripheral findings indicated by the results. In relation to the organizational factors that may influence the approach adopted for conflict resolution, these findings are presented in Table 8. Responding to the expanding body of employment rights is rated as extremely or very important by 71.4% of respondents. Devoting a minimum outlay of time and resources to the handling of workplace conflict was rated as important by 88% of respondents. Developing a less adversarial employment relationship's climate was rated as extremely or very important by 80. % of survey respondents. Expediting conflict resolution and/or resolving conflict in-house was important to over 90% of respondents.

Tables 9 and 10 also report the findings of the rate of use of commitment-orientated HRM practices and organizational factors concerning conflict management policies. It is interesting to note that 53.6% of organisations have individual performance-related pay, the same number have internal career progression for all employees. Although these practices and figures are not surprising, they do provide an insight into the numbers of employers that are providing commitment-orientated HRM practices.

The findings for the organizational factors concerning conflict management indicate that employers are providing for the rights-based practice to enable employees to be accompanied by a person of their own choosing, in 74.1% of cases. The second due process protection is a process of appeal regarding decisions taken in the conflict resolution process, at 77.8%.

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Chapter 6 - Discussion –

This chapter will demonstrate the implications of the findings reported in chapter 5, and how these findings are linked to previous research. The chapter will discuss the similarities and differences between this research and previous research, as well as demonstrating new information garnered from this survey.

Conflict management practices – rights-based/interest-based -

While the results are broadly in line with previous studies (Teague and Roche 2012) (Roche and Teague 2012a), there are some surprising results most notably, the large percentages of organisations (nearly one third of those surveyed) who claim that they do not have written conflict management procedures. This is surprising for a number of important reasons. From the employer's side, the successful resolution of conflict is necessary for successful organisational performance, if conflict is not resolved successfully, problems are likely to fester, and the employees involved may suffer from demotivation, absence, or they may exit the organisation. As described in previous literature, the provision of formal procedures, with due process protections is necessary for "procedural justice" (Aram and Salipante 1981). If an employment case is taken to a tribunal or to the Labour Court, an employer is almost certain to lose based on procedures. Indeed, if procedures are in place, but an employer has not followed them, they are still likely to lose their case.

The use of formal written procedures was seen in a large majority of respondents, for both individual and collective conflict, and these results are as expected (Roche and Teague 2012a)

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) -

The findings also reveal important information regarding the use of ADR procedures in organisations. It can be observed in the results that there is a wider-range of interested-based practices in use in collective conflict than individual conflict. We could postulate on the reasons for this, perhaps the stakes are higher, or the influence of multi-national companies on the Irish workplace landscape has provided ‘best practice’ in these mechanisms (Collings et al 2008).

Teague et al (2015) found a cautious approach amongst HR managers to the implementation of “innovative” or ADR practices. There are a number of reasons for why this may be, cost; time; upheaval of change; no proven method of conflict resolution. The results in this case, although not generalizable to the population under investigation, suggest that although few organisations may utilise all of the practices, there are some organisations that are using, or experimenting with these ADR practices, and in time, they may become more widely available. Currie et al (2016) argued that there is not yet one definite conflict management practice that has been adopted by a significant number of employers (except formal procedures).

There are varied mechanisms and practices named in the literature, most of which have originated from American corporations, and some of them could potentially be integrated in to a conflict management “system” in Irish organisations, in order to develop a strategic focus on conflict management and resolution.

In reviewing the results for ADR practices, it has been seen in the literature that these have been termed “interest-based” practices, as opposed to the rights-based practices of formal procedures, and formal adjudication, however, the interest-based procedures can be further divided down in to “preventative” procedures; those which, when used in organisational conflict management mechanisms, can serve to prevent conflict from escalating, or resolving it at its lowest level. These procedures, if used correctly, could be important practices for preventing conflict even occurring in the first place.

The most common form of ADR is a formal-open door policy, seen in over 50% of respondents. This is a preventative technique where employees may speak to any manager or supervisor in the organisation, and they are not confined to their immediate manager. This technique can have important implications as a large part of the conflict in the workplace occurs with employees line managers (CIPD 2008a). In relation to individual conflict, it was salient to note the relatively high use of employee ‘hotlines and email based ‘speak up’ services (21.4%) and the use of employee advocates (17.9%).

It was expected, based on previous research findings, that these interest-based and preventative techniques would have a much lower usage rate in Irish organisations. The use of pro-active forms of conflict management and resolution can ensure that conflict is minimised.

As expected, there is much higher use of interest-based techniques in relation to collective conflict. It is posited that this may be because these techniques have been utilised during the years of social partnership in Irish public service organisations, or perhaps in an attempt to develop a less adversarial negotiation strategy with trade unions, organisations have opted to implement these practices and they are now a 'best practice' in collective conflict resolution.

The use of 'negotiation' or using external experts early to avoid deadlock is used in around 35% of organisations, this is surprising as, in order to avoid 'deadlock' or power-based practices, such as strikes, negotiation with an expert at an early stage provides the opportunity to overcome this (Teague et al 2012). The WRC workplace conciliation programme and its early resolution service have assisted negotiation at their core. Perhaps with the introduction of these services to a wider population, their use will increase.

There are a number of preventative techniques that are being utilised by respondents for collective conflict, these include 'Brainstorming' or problem solving techniques to resolve disputes, which are used in 28.6% of employers surveyed, intensive formal communication regarding impending change is used in 39.3%, and interest-based ('win-win') bargaining techniques, which are used 39.3% of respondents. These results are anticipated in light of the literature on collective conflict (Teague et al 2012). However, a number of these techniques are also important for preventing and managing individual conflict, for example, communication, problem solving and mediation.

Line managers involvement in conflict management –

The results for hypothesis 2 suggest that organisations are not utilising line managers for formal conflict management, but are using them for informal "sense-making" with their teams. However, organisations are enabling line managers to resolve grievances formally, so although not measured here, that line managers are involved in this process utilising formal procedures in the organisation. Over 80% of respondents agreed that line managers lacked the confidence to successfully deal with conflict resolution. These results compare with the training afforded to line managers as only 11.1% of respondents train their line managers in formal conflict management training. Between 40% of respondents train their line managers in grievance and disciplinary procedures only and 25% coach their line managers. 44.4% don't training their line managers in conflict management.

Innovative techniques –

Hypothesis 3 postulated that organisations were not using innovative techniques in conflict management, the results indicate that the theory so far is correct, Irish organisations, for the most part, are sticking to tried and tested dispute resolution procedures. The themes that emerged from the participants who said that they had used innovative techniques centred on “mediation”.

The use of mediation as a stand-alone technique was also examined in this survey, and it was found that 57.1% of organisations had used mediation; in addition, 81.3% of organisations that had used it had found it to be successful. This is a positive result for this study. Mediation is a cost-effective route to avoiding litigation in workplace disputes.

Limitations of study -

The total responses received were 30, which although a low number, for a quantitative analysis, the organisations sampled cover a diverse range of retail and other organisations within the Republic of Ireland at this time, and so they provide an interesting analysis of conflict management practices currently in use by organisations, in what is a time of change within the dispute resolution landscape in Ireland today.

Peripheral results -

The peripheral results that were studied in relation to the factors that may influence conflict management, commitment-orientated HRM practices and conflict management practices provide interesting insights in to the practices in the organisation that also influence conflict management and the adoption of other HR practices. Although we cannot infer anything from these, beyond commenting on the results.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion –

The research aimed to answer a number of objectives, and the results have provided the answers to the questions and objectives. The findings represent a snapshot of the conflict management practices of a small range of employers, at this point in time. However, the results are important as they reveal information on the use of conflict management procedures in organisations at this time of change in the external dispute resolution landscape.

The results indicated a number of conflict management practices that were in use by the organisations studied. Formal grievance procedures ranked high and were present in most organisations. A notable finding was the stated absence of grievance procedures in a significant amount of organisations (one third).

The results provided information on a number of ADR procedures that were in use. Certainly, the vast majority of employers use formal grievance procedures, which is to be expected, but significant numbers are also using alternative procedures also, especially in the area of collective conflict. However, most of the ADR techniques that were studied as part of this research are preventative techniques rather than reactive techniques for resolving conflict. The review of the literature did not postulate any further ADR techniques other than the ones studied in this research.

The role of line managers in conflict management, and their level of training was researched as from previous literature (Teague and Roche 2012) it had been seen that line managers were being given HR and conflict management responsibility, but they were not receiving training in order to complete this role, nor were they being formally appraised on this. Therefore, the results suggest that in the organisations studied, line managers are not being used for conflict management, apart from face-to-face meetings with their teams in order to gauge issues. However, previous research is theorising that line managers do have a role to play in resolving conflict informally, and they should receive proper training, in order to perform this role. This research question certainly needs further research, and a large-scale study of line managers and employers would provide the information from both sides.

Hypothesis 3 posited that organisations were not using innovative conflict management practices, however, the research on conflict practices in use for both individual and workplace conflict contradicts this view. A limitation of this question is that there is not yet a standard definition of conflict management ‘innovations’, and this term may mean different things to different people. The ADR techniques mentioned in the survey, and presented in Tables 2 and 3 provide for a range of techniques that can be implemented as “innovations” for those organisations that are not already using them. However, Teague et al (2015) had asked the question “If mediation brings such positive benefits, why is it adopted only by a minority of organisations?” (Teague et al 2015,page-6),

this question has still to be answered, although the results indicate that 50% of those surveyed are using mediation within conflict management. There is an opportunity for further research as mediation is a cost-effective approach to litigation and provides participants for a basis for rebuilding their relationship rather than damaging it further by taking an external case.

A number of studies have looked at the employers view of their own conflict management practices, however, the study of conflict resolution in the workplace would benefit from a study of the employees experience. However, it is acknowledged that a study like this may be difficult as this may prompt a focus on conflict in the employees mind, and trigger a grievance.

The study has advanced the understanding of the conflict management practices in the organisations studied; the small sample size does not allow generalisation to the wider population. However, this area of HR would benefit from further empirical studies.

It was noted after the research was completed, that there was no question asked concerning the number of grievances taken and resolved in-house and/or externally. This question would have provided invaluable data on the grievance rate in the organisations studied.

On reflection, the researcher would have removed the question “Have you implemented any innovations in conflict management”, as it is felt that this question may have been confusing, as the innovations are the ADR practices listed in previous questions.

A number of methodologies were considered before the survey method was chosen, although this method provided a large range of data. A limitation was the response rate, which at 30 respondents was quite low, and much lower than expected. In order to gain a more in depth knowledge of the issues facing employers, semi-structured interviews would be considered, as they would provide a large range of data, in order to gather useful, which could then be built upon in further research.

The research findings lend themselves to future research, using a range of the variables used in this study, for example, ADR practices, line managers and mediation.

Recommendations –

The findings of this research have practical applications in a range of organisations. Although conflict management may not be a core strategy for organisations (Teague et al 2015) in light of the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act 2015, and the increased focus that this brings on streamlining the states workplace relations infrastructure, as well as its promotion of early resolution of conflict, organisations may save considerable cost by reviewing their practices to ensure they are in line with current thinking in this important area. The workplace is changing, as organisations rapidly develop in response to organisational and competitive pressures, and as the generations of employee's in the workplace changes, employees have become more knowledgeable about their employment rights.

A suite of different types of practice, rights-based, interest-based and preventative, would ensure that all employees had a procedure with which they were comfortable in using. If the organisation has a high grievance rate at the moment, they could examine the possibility of providing conflict management training for their line managers, this could be provided by a specialist training centre or an outside consultant. An estimation of the cost would be €1000/day for a number of managers.

The literature, and the research findings in this study point to mediation as a conflict resolution practice that has potential to be available at the same rate as formal grievance and disciplinary procedures are currently. Organisations could hire mediators for specific grievances; mediation usually takes between 1-3 days. However, another possibility would be for a large company to train a member of staff to act as a mediator in less complex disputes. In order to train as a mediator, the cost would be €5,000 for a certified course, which takes 4 weekends over 4 months, thereafter, the participant would need to accumulate practice hours.

Personal learning reflection –

In reflecting on the learning that the researcher has garnered since commencing this Masters in HRM, and indeed while completing the first year last year, she has considered what, initially, she set out to achieve, and whether this has indeed been achieved. The researcher set out with the intention of gaining the theoretical and practical knowledge that the researcher felt was needed, in order to pursue a career in HR. Many people said that experience was what counts, and they are correct, but the theoretical knowledge provides the compass by which you can guide your experience. It is important to learn from the works of others that have come before, and to have the ability to critically evaluate what they have seen in order to develop your own knowledge. As the researcher worked through the course last year, it became clear that this was the career in which she wanted to spend her professional life. The completion of the Masters thesis was a fitting end to this part of the researchers learning journey as it provided for a deep understanding of the issues under investigation, and of the research process. The completion of this course was one of the most challenging experiences of life so far, however, the researcher could not have done it without the support of family, friends, and those experienced in the many myriad aspects of HR. The support and encouragement that has been afforded to every member of the college class (by every member of the class) has shown the remarkable empathy, and encouragement of another person for nothing more than to provide support and ensure everyone achieves what they set out to do.

In relation to the research, if the researcher was to undertake this type of research again, the first step would be, once the research question had been chosen, to determine the research method with particular attention to the measurement required, as it is felt that this became an issue towards the end of the thesis, when it hadn't been considered fully at the start.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Employer survey

Conflict resolution in the workplace

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important. The information provided by you in this questionnaire will be used for research purposes. It will not be used in a manner which would allow identification of your individual responses. All information received will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. If you require more information or would like to receive a copy of the results please do not hesitate to contact me at heather.macdonald@student.ncirl.ie.

The questionnaire will take approximately 5-8 minutes to complete.

Workplace conflict involves differences of view and conflict between individual employees and their employer; among individuals; and between groups of employees, whether unionized or not, and their employer. It is recognised that the resolution of workplace conflict can have beneficial effects for employers, employees and other stakeholders in the business.

1) Does your company operate in the Republic of Ireland?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

2) How many people are currently engaged in all units of your company throughout the Republic of Ireland?*

☐ 1-20

☐ 21-50

☐ 51-99

☐ 100+

3) In what year did your company commence operations in the Republic of Ireland? (Please state year)*

4) Which of the following best describes your company?*

☐ Irish owned private company

☐ Irish owned public company

☐ Semi-state

☐ Franchise

☐ Subsidiary of US-owned company

☐ Subsidiary of European-owned company

☐ Subsidiary of UK-owned company

☐ Other (please specify)

5) Please indicate which of the following best describes your company's approach to conflict resolution?*

- ☐ The company adopts a common approach to conflict resolution for all employees (i.e. the same policies for all employees)
- ☐ The company adopts formally separate approaches to conflict resolution for employees in different subsidiaries, workplaces or categories (i.e. different policies for different categories/groups of employees)

6) Approximately what percentage of your workforce is engaged in high-skill or knowledge-intensive work tasks and activities?*

- ☐ 0-20%
- ☐ 21-50%
- ☐ 51-79%
- ☐ 80% or more

7) What is the main business activity of the organisation?*

- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Services
- ☐ Financial
- ☐ Utilities
- ☐ Manufacturing

8) How important are the following in influencing the approach adopted to conflict resolution?*

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Responding to the expanding body of legislation providing employees with individual employment rights	()	()	()	()
Adapting work and employment arrangements to changes needed in response to competitive pressures	()	()	()	()
Preventing unions extending their influence into, or within, the company	()	()	()	()
Devoting a minimum outlay of time and resources to the handling of workplace conflict	()	()	()	()
	()	()	()	()

Developing a less adversarial employment relations climate				
Expediting conflict resolution and/or resolving conflict in-house	()	()	()	()
Emulating best practice in conflict resolution in leading companies	()	()	()	()
Responding to growing assertiveness by employees aware of their employment rights	()	()	()	()

(Tick all that apply)

9) Please indicate which of the following specific mechanisms or practices are in operation to resolve conflict in the workplace

*(Grievances involving individual employees)**

[] Our practice is not to operate formal written procedures, but to resolve grievances informally, adopting such measures as appear warranted by the circumstances of any disputes arising

- ☐ Formal written grievance & disciplinary procedures, involving progressively higher levels of management in resolving disputes
- ☐ Use of external experts (other than Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court)
- ☐ Use of a formal open-door policy
- ☐ Use of an employee 'hotline' or email based 'speak-up' service
- ☐ Use of employee advocates
- ☐ Use of review panels comprised of managers
- ☐ Use of company ombudsperson
- ☐ Use of review panels comprised of employees' peers.
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (Please specify):

*

(Tick all that apply)

10) Please indicate which of the following specific mechanisms or practices are in operation to resolve conflict in the workplace

*(Involving contentious issues or disputes involving groups of employees)**

- ☐ Our practice is not to operate formal written procedures, but to resolve any contentious issues or disputes arising in a manner that appears warranted by the circumstances involved
- ☐ Formal written dispute procedure involving progressively higher levels of management in resolving disputes

- ☐ Use of external experts early to assist in reaching settlement or to prevent deadlock in discussion or negotiation within the company
- ☐ Resort at final stage in procedure, where deadlock remains, to Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court
- ☐ Use of external adjudicators (other than Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court) to adjudicate disputes
- ☐ Use of 'brainstorming', problem solving & related techniques to solve problems or resolve disputes
- ☐ Use of formal interest-based ('win-win') bargaining techniques to resolve disputes
- ☐ Intensive formal communication regarding impending change with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony or conflict
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other - Write In (Required):

*

11) Have you implemented any innovative forms of conflict management?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

12) Can you describe any innovations your company has used to successfully resolve conflict?*

13) Have you used mediation as a way of resolving conflict amongst individual employees?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

14) Have you found mediation to be effective in resolving disputes amongst individual employees?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

15) Approximately how many conflicts have you resolved using mediation (other than through the Workplace Relations Commission) in the last 12 months?*

(Tick all that apply)

16) Thinking of those employees to whom the conflict resolution practices and mechanisms you are describing apply, please indicate whether the following HR practices are in use.*

☐ A formal performance management system

- ☐ Individual performance-related pay
- ☐ Group performance-related pay
- ☐ Profit sharing/share ownership
- ☐ Formally designated teamworking
- ☐ Regular employee surveys
- ☐ Employees formally assessed at time of hiring for values, attitudes or personality
- ☐ A policy of no compulsory redundancies
- ☐ Common (single-status) terms and conditions of employment
- ☐ A system of regular team briefing that provides employees with business information
- ☐ Internal career progression as a formal objective for all employees
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other - Write In (Required):

*

17) Does the company have a specialist HR manager or a HR department?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

18) Is the HR director a member of the company's senior management committee?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

19) Please give the number of staff in the HR department.*

☐ 1-2

☐ 2-4

☐ 5+

20) Is a trade union (or more than one trade union) recognised?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

21) Is there a formal partnership agreement or arrangement involving the trade union(s)?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

22) Please indicate the approximate percentage of employees who are unionized*

☐ 0-20%

☐ 21-50%

☐ 51-80%

☐ 81-99%

☐ 100%

23) Is there...*

- ☐ Single-union representation
- ☐ More than one Union

24) Does the presence of more than one union have a significant adverse effect on the management of conflict resolution?*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

25) Which of the following best describes the position adopted towards trade unions?*

- ☐ We are satisfied to engage in the traditional way with the union(s)
- ☐ Our objective is to reduce the influence of the union(s)
- ☐ Our objective is to deepen partnership with the union(s)

26) **Thinking of the role line managers and supervisors play in resolving conflict, please give your assessment of the following areas***

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Line managers and supervisors are formally trained to handle workplace conflict	()	()	()	()
Line managers and supervisors are required to conduct regular face-to-face meetings with employees to gauge areas of concern to them and resolve problems	()	()	()	()
Line managers' and supervisors' competence in employee relations is specifically assessed when their own performance is appraised	()	()	()	()
Line managers and supervisors are specifically and formally enabled to resolve employee problems quickly and informally whenever possible	()	()	()	()
In practice, line managers and supervisors lack the confidence to resolve workplace conflict and rely on HR managers or senior managers	()	()	()	()

(Tick all that apply)

27) What sort of training do line managers and supervisors receive in relation to conflict management?*

- ☐ Training in company grievance and disciplinary procedures only
- ☐ Formal conflict management training
- ☐ Coaching on conflict management techniques
- ☐ Line managers and supervisors do not receive training in conflict management techniques
- ☐ Other - Write In (Required):

_____ *

(Tick all that apply)

28) Please indicate whether any of the following practices are in operation *

- ☐ Formal audits of conflict resolution practices or use of external consultants to review these practices and advise on improvements
- ☐ The conflict resolution procedures in the company are formally communicated to employees in employee handbooks and/or induction training
- ☐ The conflict resolution procedures in the company are rooted in statutory codes of practice
- ☐ Employees or their representatives are/were involved in the design or review of conflict resolution procedures & practices

[] Employees pursuing a grievance or claim can be accompanied or represented by persons of their own choosing

[] Employees have a right of appeal regarding decisions taken in the conflict resolution process

29) Please give your assessment of the following aspects of conflict resolution*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The costs of managing conflict are too high	()	()	()	()
The conflict resolution practices need to resolve problems more quickly	()	()	()	()
Employees are confident about openly expressing their views, even where these run counter to managements' views & practices	()	()	()	()
The company experiences too many employment grievances or disputes	()	()	()	()
The conflict resolution practices contribute positively to the climate of employment relations in the	()	()	()	()

company				
Conflict resolution practices are excessively formalized and preclude informal handling of workplace conflict.	()	()	()	()

30) Please indicate the following aspects of your experience of workplace conflict during the past year*

(Please indicate the approximate number)

	0	1	2	5+
The number of individual grievances taken pursuant to protective legislation to the Workplace Relations Commission (and/or Employment Appeals Tribunal, Equality Tribunal, Labour Court, Rights Commissioners, Courts)	()	()	()	()
The number of disputes referred to the Workplace Relations Commission/Labour Court pursuant to Industrial Relations legislation	()	()	()	()
The number of instances where industrial action of any kind was threatened or undertaken	()	()	()	()
The number of instances where external experts (other than from WRC/Labour Court) were involved in resolving conflict	()	()	()	()

31) **Thinking in terms of the entity for which you have described conflict resolution practices and their effects, please assess its performance in the following areas compared with other companies in the industry.**

	Significantl y below average	Below averag e	About averag e	Above averag e	Significantl y above average
Compared with other companies in your industry, how would you assess the level of labour productivity	()	()	()	()	()
Compared with other companies in your industry, how would you assess the rate of voluntary labour turnover	()	()	()	()	()
Compared with other companies in your industry,	()	()	()	()	()

how would you assess the rate of employee absence through sickness or other Causes					
Compared with other companies in your industry, how would you rate the capacity to handle change	()	()	()	()	()

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my questionnaire

Appendix 2: List of tables and Figures

Table 2 - The use of conflict resolution practices in conflict concerning individual employees

Type of conflict resolution practice	% Of respondents
Our practice is not to operate formal written grievance procedures, but to resolve grievances informally, adopting such measures as appear warranted by the circumstances of any dispute arising	32.1%
Formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures involving progressively higher levels of management	82.1%
Use of external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court)	21.4%
Use of a formal open-door policy	57.1%
Use of an employee 'hotline' or email based 'speak up service'	21.4%
Use of employee advocates	17.9%
Use of review panels comprised of managers	3.6%
Use of review panels comprised of employees' peers	3.6%

Table 3 – The use of conflict resolution practices in collective conflict

Type of conflict management practices	% Of respondents
Our practice is not to operate formal procedures, but to resolve any contentious issues or disputes arising in a manner that appears warranted by the circumstances involved	35.7%
Formal written dispute procedure involving progressively higher levels of management	78.6%
Use of external experts early to assist in reaching settlement or to prevent deadlock in discussion or negotiation with the company	35.7%
Resort at final stage in the procedure, where deadlock remains, to WRC or Labour Court	25%
Use of external adjudicators (other than WRC or Labour Court) to adjudicate disputes	14.3%
Use of ‘Brainstorming’, problem solving and related techniques to resolve disputes	28.6%
Use of formal interest-based (‘win-win’) bargaining techniques	21.4%
Intensive formal communication regarding impending change with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony and conflict	39.3%

Table 4 - The use of conflict resolution practices resulting in a low grievance rate (individual conflict)

The company experiences too many grievances or disputes	Responding to the expanding body of legislation providing employees with individual employment rights	Expediting conflict resolution and/or resolving conflict in-house	Formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures involving progressively higher levels of management in resolving disputes	Use of external experts (other than Workplace Relations Commission or Labour Court)	Use of a formal open-door policy	Use of an employee 'hotline' or email-based 'speak up' service	Use of employee advocates	Use of review panels comprised of managers	Use of company Ombudsperson	Use of employee review panels
Strongly Agree	7.14% (2)	7.14% (2)	7.14% (2)	0	7.14% (2)	0	7.14% (2)	0	0	0
Agree	3.57% (1)	3.57% (1)	3.57% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	32.14% (9)	39.28% (11)	35.71% (10)	7.14% (2)	28.57% (8)	7.14% (2)	0	0	0	0
Strongly Disagree	28.57% (8)	42.86% (12)	35.71% (10)	14.28% (4)	21.43% (6)	14.28% (4)	10.71% (3)	3.57% (1)	0	3.57% (1)

Table 5 - The use of conflict resolution practices resulting in a low grievance rate (collective conflict)

The company experiences too many grievances or disputes	Formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures involving progressively higher levels of management in resolving disputes	Use of external experts early to assist in reaching settlement or to prevent deadlock in discussion or negotiation with the company	Resort at final stage in procedure, where deadlock remains, to WRC or Labour Court	Use of external adjudicators (other than WRC or Labour Court) to adjudicate disputes	Use of 'brainstorming' problem-solving and techniques to solve problems or resolve disputes	Use of formal interest-based ('win-win') bargaining techniques to solve problems or resolve disputes	Intensive formal communication regarding impending change with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony or conflict
Strongly Agree	7.14% (2)	0	3.57% (1)	0	0	3.57% (1)	3.57% (1)
Agree	3.57% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	32.14% (9)	17.86% (5)	10.71% (3)	7.14% (2)	10.71% (3)	7.14% (2)	25% (7)
Strongly Disagree	35.71% (10)	17.86% (5)	10.71% (3)	7.14% (2)	17.86% (5)	10.71% (3)	10.71% (3)

Table 6 - The number of incidents where external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court) were used in individual conflict in the past year

The numbers of instances where external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court) were involved in resolving conflicts during the past year	Our practice is not to operate formal written procedures, but instead to resolve grievances informally, adopting such measures as appear warranted by the circumstances of any disputes arising	Formal written grievance and disciplinary procedures, involving progressively higher levels of management	Use of external experts other than the WRC or the Labour Court	Use of a formal open-door policy	Use of an employee 'hotline' or email based 'speak up' service	Use of employee advocates
0	25% (7)	53.57% (15)	14.28% (4)	39.28% (11)	14.28% (4)	10.71% (3)
1	3.57% (1)	14.28% (4)	3.57% (1)	10.71% (3)	3.57% (1)	7.14% (2)
2	3.57% (1)	7.14% (2)	0	3.57% (1)	0	0
5+	0	3.57% (1)	0	0	0	0

Use of review panels comprised of managers, use of company ombudsperson, and use of panels comprised of employees' peers - low numbers affecting results

Table 7 - The number of instances where external experts (other than the WRC and Labour Court) were used in collective conflict in the past year

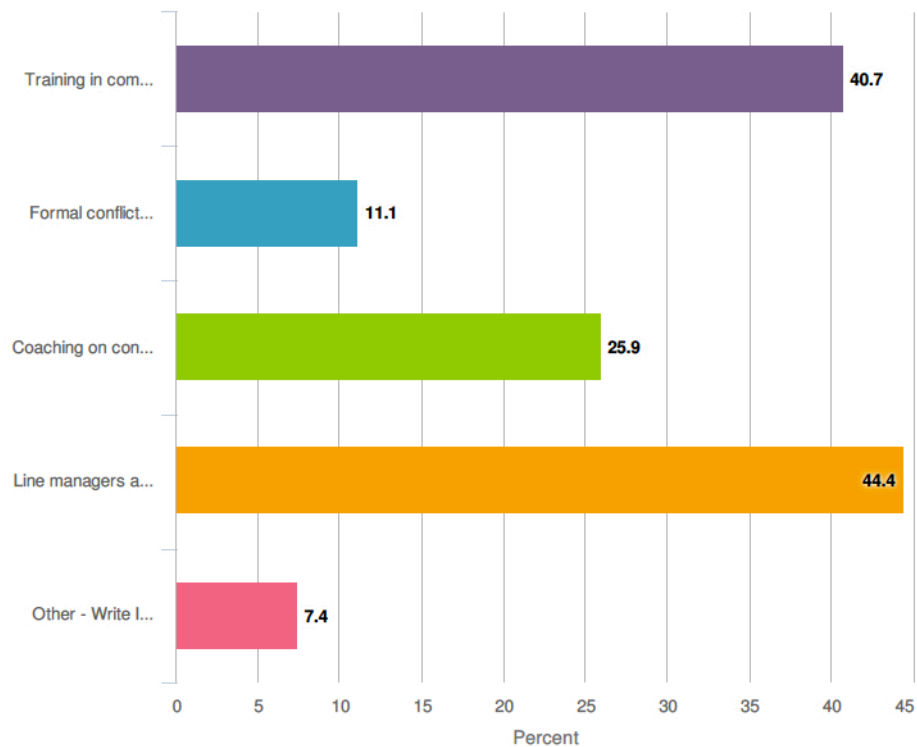
The numbers of instances where external experts (other than the WRC or Labour Court) were involved in resolving conflicts during the past year	Our practice is not to operate formal written procedures, but to resolve any contentious issues or disputes in a manner that appears warranted by the circumstances involved	Formal written dispute resolution procedures involving progressively higher levels of management	Use of external experts early to assist in reaching settlement or to prevent deadlock in discussion or negotiation with the company	Resort at final stage in the procedure, where deadlock remains, to the WRC or Labour Court	Use of external adjudicators (other than the WRC or Labour Court)	Use of 'Brainstorming' problem-solving or and related techniques to solve problems or disputes	Use of formal interest-based ('win-win') bargaining techniques	Intensive formal communication regarding impending changes with groups of employees with a view to avoiding disharmony or conflict
0	25% (7)	53.57% (15)	25% (7)	17.85% (5)	7.14% (2)	17.85% (5)	10.74% (3)	25% (7)
1	3.57% (1)	14.28% (4)	7.14% (2)	3.57% (1)	3.57% (1)	7.14% (2)	7.14% (2)	7.14% (2)
2	7.14% (2)	3.57% (1)	0	0	0	3.57% (1)	0	3.57% (1)
5+	0	3.57% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Thinking of the role line managers and supervisors play in resolving conflict, please give your assessment of the following areas

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Line managers and supervisors are formally trained to handle workplace conflict	4 14.3%	7 25.0%	12 42.9%	5 17.9%
Line managers and supervisors are required to conduct regular face-to-face meetings with employees to gauge areas of concern to them and resolve problems	10 35.7%	12 42.9%	6 21.4%	0 0.0%
Line managers' and supervisors' competence in employee relations is specifically assessed when their own performance is appraised	0 0.0%	11 39.3%	12 42.9%	5 17.9%
Line managers and supervisors are specifically and formally enabled to resolve employee problems quickly and informally whenever possible	5 17.9%	14 50.0%	7 25.0%	2 7.1%
In practice, line managers and supervisors lack the confidence to resolve workplace conflict and rely on HR managers or senior managers	9 32.1%	14 50.0%	4 14.3%	1 3.6%

Figure 2 - The role of line managers in resolving conflict

What sort of training do line managers and supervisors receive in relation to conflict management?



Value	Percent	Count
Training in company grievance and disciplinary procedures only	40.7%	11
Formal conflict management training	11.1%	3
Coaching on conflict management techniques	25.9%	7
Line managers and supervisors do not receive training in conflict management techniques	44.4%	12
Other - Write In (Required)	7.4%	2

Figure 3 - The training that line managers receive in relation to conflict management

Have you implemented any innovative forms of conflict management?

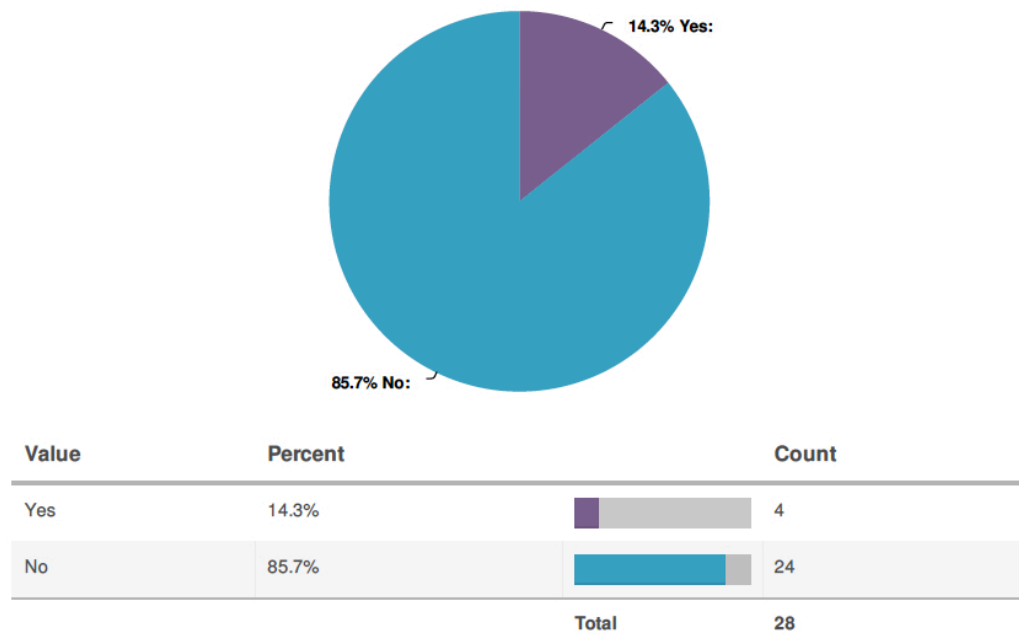


Figure 4 - The rate of implementation of innovative conflict resolution practices

Have you used mediation as a way of resolving conflict amongst individual employees?

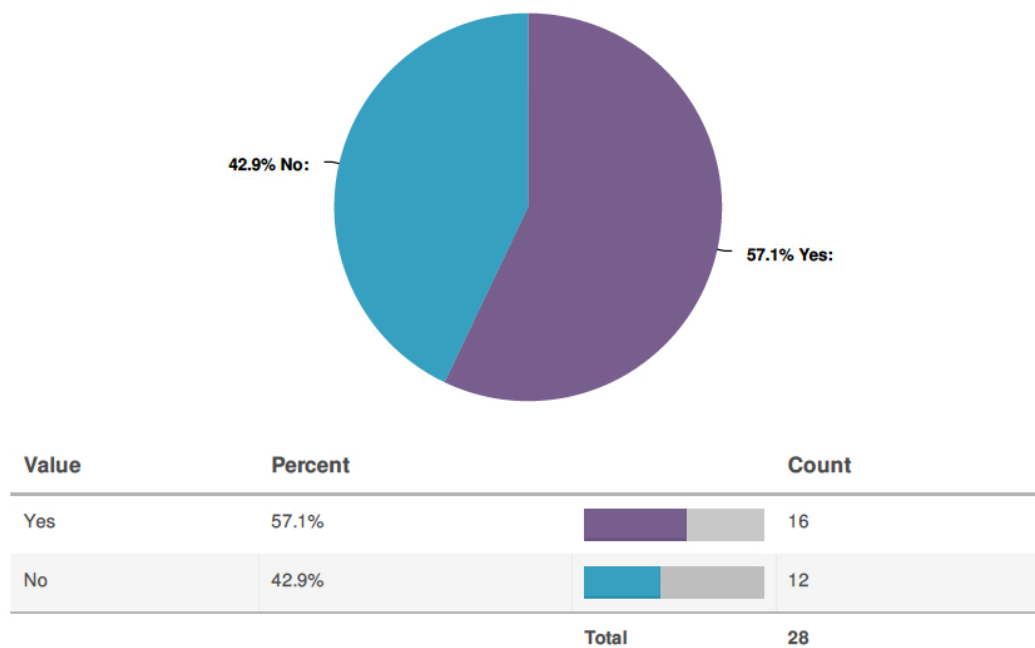


Figure 5 - The rate of the use of mediation as a way of resolving conflict amongst individual employees

Have you found mediation to be effective in resolving disputes amongst individual employees?

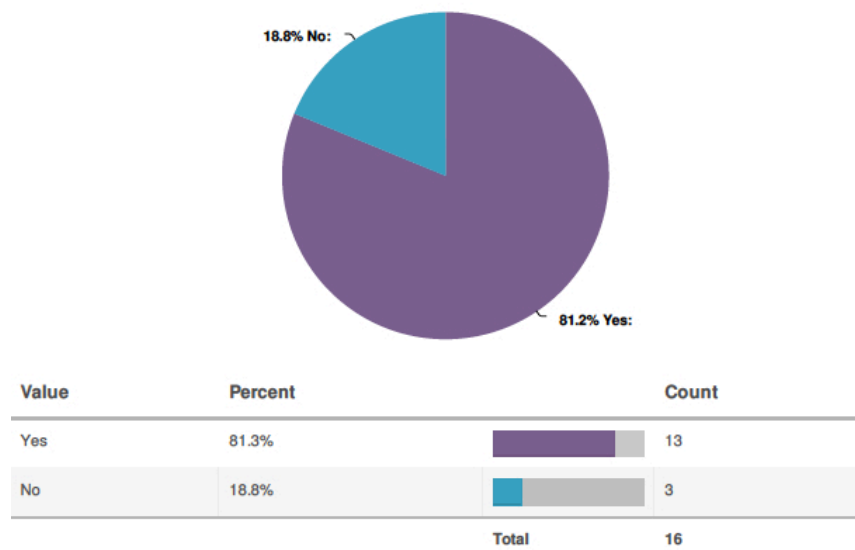


Figure 6 - The effectiveness of mediation in conflict resolution amongst individual employees

Table 8 - Factors that may influence the approach adopted for conflict resolution

	Extremely important	Very Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Responding to the expanding body of legislation providing employees with individual employment rights	(13) 46.4%	(7) 25%	(8) 28.6%	(0) 0%
Adapting work and employment arrangements to changes needed in response to competitive pressures	(2) 7.1%	(15) 53.6%	(6) 21.4%	(5) 17.9%
Preventing unions extending their influence in to, or within, the company	(10) 35.7%	(5) 17.9%	(4) 14.3%	(9) 32.1%
Devoting a minimum outlay of time and resources to the handling of workplace conflict	(6) 21.4%	(12) 42.9%	(6) 21.4%	(4) 14.3%
Developing a less adversarial employment relations climate	(12) 42.9%	(8) 28.6%	(3) 10.7%	(5) 17.9%
Expediting conflict resolution and/or resolving conflict in-house	(17) 60.7%	(9) 32.1%	(2) 7.1%	(0) 0%
Emulating best practice in conflict resolution in leading companies	(8) 28.6%	(7) 25%	(9) 32.1%	(4) 14.3%
Responding to growing assertiveness of employees aware of their employment rights	(7) 25%	(13) 46.4%	(5) 17.9%	(3) 10.7%

Table 9 – The rate of use of commitment-orientated HRM practices

A formal performance management system	82.1%
Individual performance-related pay	53.6%
Group performance-related pay	17.9%
Profit sharing/Share ownership	10.7%
Formally designated team-working	10.7%
Regular employee surveys	21.4%
Employees formally assessed at the time of hiring for values, attitudes of personality	50%
A policy of no compulsory redundancies	10.7%
Common (single-status) terms and conditions of employment	57.1%
A system of regular team briefing that provides employees with business information	64.3%
Internal career progression as a formal objective for all employees	53.6%

Table 10 - Organisational factors related to conflict management

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Formal audits of conflict resolution practices or use of external consultants to review these practices and advise on improvements	3.7%
The conflict resolution procedures in the company are formally communicated to employees in employee handbooks and/or induction training	81.5%
The conflict resolution procedures in the company are rooted in statutory codes of practice	59.3%
Employees or their representatives are/were involved in the design or review of conflict resolution procedures and practices	18.5%
Employees pursuing grievances can choose to be accompanied by persons of their own choosing	74.1%
Employees have a right of appeal regarding decisions taken in the conflict resolution process	77.8%

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Student number: 14112051

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