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Interpersonal conflict in the workplace: the role of self-awareness in constructive versus destructive approaches to conflict

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INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE:

THE ROLE OF SELF-AWARENESS IN CONSTRUCTIVE

VERSUS DESTRUCTIVE APPROACHES TO CONFLICT

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by

Christine Allee

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Abstract

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace is costly to employees, teams, and businesses. This study investigated the role of self-awareness in the effective handling of conflict and the efficacy of self-development training in raising self-awareness and conflict effectiveness. This mixed methods study utilized quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Subjects reported their self-awareness and their conflict effectiveness via two self-assessment surveys. This study found a strong correlation between self-development training and conflict effectiveness, as well as a correlation between understanding the subjective construal of meaning and an ability to use that self-awareness during an interpersonal conflict at work. Given the enormous costs to businesses and individuals of interpersonal conflict at work, it would be advantageous to continue to research how the field of OD can contribute to mitigating these costs through effective personal-development training programs.

Keywords: interpersonal conflict, self-awareness, self-development, conflict

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace continues to be costly to employees, teams, and businesses. According to Porath and Pearson (2010), workplace incivility constitutes a significant drain on American companies, resulting in lost time, effort, energy, focus, creativity, loyalty, and commitment. Similarly, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) found a strong negative correlation between interpersonal conflict and both team performance and team member satisfaction levels.

Conflict has been defined in many ways. Hartwick and Barki (2004) identified three themes that underlie many of these descriptions of conflict: disagreement, interference, and negative emotion. Interpersonal conflict, also called relationship or emotional conflict, seems to be primarily driven by the theme of negative emotion. Barki and Hartwick (2001) defined interpersonal conflict as "a phenomenon that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals" (p. 199).

The current research sought to understand how aware people are of their interpretation and meaning making in situations of interpersonal conflict at work. According to Lieberman (2022), prior to reflective conscious thought, we make meaning of our world in a way that feels effortless. Lieberman (2022) claims this creates *naïve realism*, defined as "the sense that how one sees the world is an objective reflection of reality and that other perspectives are irrational" (p. 4). This research further explored if one tends to see one's interpretation of a colleague's behavior (one's meaning-making) and the corresponding implied intentions behind them as the truth, rather than just the meaning one is making in the situation. How frequently does one think about why a colleague's behavior triggers them emotionally and examine one's mental models and

habits of meaning-making? This research further explored the role of intrapersonal development work as it relates to creating a conscious understanding of one's mental models around interpersonal conflict. Specifically, this research examined whether those with high self-awareness around how they make meaning during interpersonal conflict situations at work can make conscious choices to handle those conflicts in a more constructive way than those who lack such self-awareness and simply respond to conflict in a more destructive way, with a default (not consciously chosen) reaction.

Jehn (1994, 1995) indicated that task conflict was positively associated with work group performance but found a negative association with group performance and satisfaction stemming from relationship conflict. This interpersonal conflict was found to cause distress and withdrawal. Relationship conflict results in members being more concerned with dealing with the interpersonal issues at play than with effective task completion. Jehn (1994, 1995) found that interpersonal conflict can be identified by friction, tension, dislike, or other affective components and can relate to non-work topics such as hobbies or opinions. Because of its negative impact, managers may need to step in and make changes to groups or assignments if interpersonal conflict is escalating.

De Dreu and Weingart (2003) challenged Jehn's (1994, 1995) assertion that task conflict was positively correlated with team performance. De Dreu and Weingart (2003) studied the dynamics between relationship conflict, task conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction and found both task and relationship conflict held negative consequences for team performance. However, they did find that relationship conflict was more disruptive to team member satisfaction than task conflict. They hypothesized this was because relationship conflict is more emotional and, therefore, more likely to

draw out a negative affective response. They concluded that leaders should pay attention to what type of conflict is emerging and, when they identify relationship conflict, they agreed with Jehn (1994, 1995) that the stakes are high enough that strategies to mitigate the conflict should be employed.

Frone (2000) developed and tested a model of interpersonal conflict, which showed that interpersonal conflict with supervisors was positively related to poor organizational outcomes such as lower job satisfaction and lower commitment to the organization. Frone (2000) found that interpersonal conflict with work peers was positively related to poor personal psychological outcomes such as depression, somatic symptoms, and lowered self-esteem.

Ul Haq (2011) investigated the relationship between interpersonal conflict and stress in the workplace. The analysis strongly supported a positive association of interpersonal conflict with workplace stress, workplace deviance, and intention to quit. Similarly, Gigol and Sypniewsa (2019) found interpersonal conflict to have negative impacts on stress, psychosomatic problems, and burnout.

Barki and Hartwick (2001) challenged the assumption in the literature (Pondy, 1967; Wall & Callister, 1995) that interpersonal conflict is in and of itself neither good nor bad. Barki and Hartwick (2001) showed negative emotion to be a significant component of interpersonal conflict, thus leading to one's experience of interpersonal conflict being perceived as unfavorable. They showed a consistently negative effect on outcomes, even when the conflict was managed well.

Porath and Pearson (2010) approached interpersonal conflict from the lens of uncivil behavior in the workplace. They unearthed alarming statistical data about the high

cost of incivility (interpersonal conflict) at work. They found that when employees are subject to incivility at work:

- 94% get even with their offender

- 88% get even with their employer

- 48% intentionally decreased work effort

- 47% intentionally decrease time at work

- 38% intentionally decreased quality of work

- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident

- 63% lost work time avoiding the offender

- 66% reported their performance declined

- 78% reported a decline in their commitment to the organization

- 12% reported they left the organization as a result

Porath and Pearson (2010) found that worker concentration suffered after an incivility incident and short-term memory was impacted, with a 20% hit to their recall. They found that those who simply witnessed incivility (but did not experience it themselves) were strongly influenced, performing 33% worse on verbal tasks and coming up with 39% fewer creative ideas. Another cost hit workers psychological safety (the belief that one is in a safe environment to take risks) in that individuals who experienced incivility were not comfortable asking for help, offering ideas, sharing problems, or admitting mistakes.

The current study addressed three research questions:

1. Are individuals with higher self-awareness more effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work?

2. Do individuals with higher self-awareness of how they make meaning consciously use that self-knowledge during interpersonal conflict situations at work?

3. Does formal training in self-development work impact in-the-moment self-awareness during interpersonal conflict such that the person is better able to handle interpersonal conflict at work?

The current study is important, given the wealth of research on the high costs to businesses and individuals of interpersonal conflict in the workplace that many researchers have written about (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Frone, 2000; Gigol & Sypniewska, 2019; Ilies et al., 2011; Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Porath & Pearson, 2010; Ul Haq, 2011). The more businesses understand about what causes workers to handle interpersonal conflict constructively versus destructively, the better positioned Organizational Development (OD) practitioners are to craft effective interventions to help workers address these potentially costly incidents in the workplace.

This chapter provided an overview of the focus of this research and a justification for why it is important to study. Chapter 2 covers the literature review, including how conflict has been defined over the years and research into self-awareness. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods, design, and planned analysis for this study. Chapter 4 covers the research results and findings and Chapter 5 offers analysis of the results and suggests implications for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This paper looked at conflict in general and how previous research has defined and differentiated interpersonal or relationship conflict from other types of conflict. Additionally, I reviewed the research on how human beings construct meaning, how aware they tend to be of that process, and the extent to which this kind of self-awareness impacts interpersonal relationships.

Conflict Definitions

Conflict has been defined in many ways. Mack and Snyder (1957) suggested a set of properties as a model for identifying conflictful behaviors and conflict relationships, insisting that conflict does not exist without these properties. They claimed that for conflict to be present, there must be at least two parties competing for a scarce resource or position, such that one party must thwart the other party to gain what they want for themselves. These parties must interact with each other and attempt to acquire or use power for conflict to be present. Wall and Callister (1995) agreed conflict results from one viewing their own interests as being impacted negatively by another party.

Pondy (1967) contributed significantly to the literature on conflict by outlining the five stages of conflict: latent conflict, perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict, and conflict aftermath. Pondy (1967) developed a general theory of organizational conflict, acknowledging that conflict includes multiple properties such as scarcity of resources and conflictful behaviors involving resistance or aggression, but eschewed a static definition of conflict, instead considering it a dynamic process that should be looked at as a series of conflict episodes that build on each other.

Fink (1968) considered antagonism to be the common element in all conflicts, whether an antagonistic psychological relationship or just an antagonistic interaction.

Some of the many examples of antagonism included incompatible goals, emotional hostility, and various forms of mutual interference, no single instance of which must always be present in an interpersonal conflict.

A number of researchers (Amason, 1996; Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Jehn, 1995; Pinkley, 1990; Pondy, 1967) have advocated for including negative emotions (e.g., frustration, jealousy, anger) as a definitional property of conflict. For instance, Barki and Hartwick (2001) defined it as "a phenomenon that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals" (p. 199). They considered one's perception of the four properties of interdependence, disagreement, interference, and negative emotion as indicators of the individual's perceived level of conflict. They found that all three components (disagreement, interference, and negative emotion) must be present for interpersonal conflict to exist.

Jehn (1994, 1995) differentiated the definitions of task conflict from relationship conflict by considering task conflict to occur based on differing opinions or viewpoints about the work tasks being completed, while relationship conflict as being about interpersonal incompatibilities that typically lead to tension and negative emotion. Given the affective nature of her relationship conflict definition, Jehn (1994, 1995) positions relationship conflict as general rather than being about a specified task or issue.

Similarly, Amason (1996) differentiated between cognitive and affective conflict. Cognitive conflict was defined as being task-oriented and affective conflict as being personal in nature. It was also noted that cognitive conflict may trigger affective conflict and found that this happens when cognitive disagreement is seen as a personal criticism.

Amason (1996) noted the similarity between task and cognitive conflict, as well as between relationship and affective conflict.

Hartwick and Barki (2004) developed a two-dimensional framework of interpersonal conflict, resulting in an assessment of the conflict on four levels. These are cognition/disagreement, behavior/interference, affect/negative emotion, and overall conflict. Each of these was then analyzed based on task conflict (divided into outcome and process) and non-task conflict (divided into organizational or non-organizational issue). Thus, Hartwick and Barki (2004) see process conflict as a component of task conflict rather than a distinct category of conflict, which diverged from past research (Amason, 1996; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Though slightly different terms are used, there is consensus on five conflict management strategies (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Dreu et al., 2001; De Dreu et al., 1999; Thomas & Kilmann, 2001): problem-solving/collaborating/integration, compromising, dominating/competing/asserting/forcing, yielding/accommodating, and avoiding/inaction. These strategies are based on the dual concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964) and can be seen as a function of concern for self-versus concern for others. High concern for both self and others leads to problem-solving/collaborating/integration, while low concern for both self and others leads to avoiding/inaction. High concern for self, coupled with low concern for others, leads to dominating/competing/asserting/forcing, and high concern for others, coupled with low concern for self, leads to yielding/accommodating. Compromising can be seen as a moderate concern for both self and others. Dominating/competing/asserting/forcing, compromising, and yielding/accommodating are all considered distributive because they assume a fixed amount of outcome that can

be distributed among the parties. Inaction/avoiding and problem-solving/collaborating/integration are considered integrative since they respectively diminish or expand the outcomes available to be allocated.

De Dreu et al. (1999) saw conflict as being characterized by tension resulting from perceived differences. They further broke conflict into four parts: conflict issue (what is causing the tension), conflict experience (feelings, cognitions, and intentions related to the conflict issue), conflict management (behavior used to address said tension), and conflict outcome (the quality of the resolution to the tension). While not specifically breaking interpersonal conflict out into these four parts, this thesis explores all four stages from the lens of the role that self-awareness plays across the conflict interaction, from the initial feeling of tension to the final outcome.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness comes into the literature both directly and indirectly. Goleman (2007) included self-awareness as one of the four subsets of emotional intelligence (EI). The four quadrants of EI are self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management. While Goleman (2007) did not study self-awareness as a stand-alone quality, it was measured as a part of one's overall EI. Eurich (2018) focused directly on self-awareness and differentiated between internal and external self-awareness; internal awareness relates to understanding one's inner world and external awareness relates to understanding one's impact on others and how one is being perceived. Eurich (2018) called out that there is often a gap between how we see ourselves and how others see us, and that this gap can lead to interpersonal conflicts. While both authors use different language, there is overlap in the concepts they discuss and Eurich (2018) builds on Goleman (2007), in regards to self and social awareness.

Beitler et al. (2018) looked at the relationship between Emotional Competence (EC) and conflict management, finding that EC was positively related to the problem-solving and compromising styles of conflict management. They referenced four main sub-divisions of EC originally proposed by Mayer et al. (2000): perceiving, understanding, using, and managing emotions, which overlay the four quadrants of EI put forth by Goleman (2007). Of these four, the two sub-divisions most relevant to self-awareness are using emotions (sensitivity to one's emotions) and managing emotions (including the ability to calm oneself down when emotionally triggered).

Usprech and Lam (2020), in their research on using self-awareness and empathy as conflict mitigation tools for engineering students, hypothesized that greater levels of self-awareness and empathy would lead to more adaptive ways of handling conflict. Their experiment measured students' self-reported level of preparedness for handling conflict before and after an intervention and indicated that students felt more prepared after the training. There was also a modest increase in measured self-awareness after the training, as judged by a slight decrease in students reporting feeling misunderstood. A limitation of this data could be that feeling understood or misunderstood does not necessarily indicate one's level of self-awareness.

Hede (2007), building on concepts from Jungian Psychology, distinguished between the overt self and the shadow self. Hede (2007) described the overt self as how we define ourselves to ourselves and the way that we manage our interactions with others. It is what we intentionally reveal about ourselves to others. The shadow self was described as the opposite of the overt self and made up of the qualities that we do not accept in ourselves and may as a result project onto others. Hede (2007) proposed that

shadow-self-awareness would predict emotional reactivity and that individuals with a high-level inner-awareness about their shadow self would be less likely than those with low awareness to become entangled in interpersonal conflict. While the research conducted in this thesis did not specifically use the concept of the shadow self, the connection between one's self-awareness of their inner world and their emotional reactivity during conflict was explored.

Rahim et al. (2002) focused their research on the five dimensions of EQ: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. They considered self-awareness to be about understanding one's own emotions and comprehending why one is experiencing them, as well as being aware of how one's moods or feelings might be affecting others. Rahim et al. (2002) indicated that self-awareness is positively associated with self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. This finding supports the expectation of this thesis that individuals with high self-awareness (and an understanding of why they are emotionally triggered) may be able to navigate interpersonal conflict more constructively than their less self-aware peers.

Pinkley (1990) approached conflict from the cognitive interpretation of the people involved, referred to as dimensions of conflict frame, to describe how people perceive conflict based on their past conflict experiences and their current interests. Three dimensions of cognitive interpretations of conflict were identified: relationship versus task, emotional versus intellectual, and compromise versus win. Pinkley (1990) wondered whether one's conflict frame should be considered a trait or state variable. This question is relevant to this thesis as it could pertain to how much individuals can change their conflict responses and what situations would make that more or less challenging.

Mangiofico and Tompkins (2021) explored the role of one's interpretation of a situation or the behavior of another in shaping a conflict experience. They referred to this as the self-referential nature of how each party in the conflict makes sense of what is happening. Using the concept of the incivility spiral (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), Mangiofico and Tompkins (2021) looked at the role of an individual's sensemaking to trigger or stop the spiral based on how they perceive the behavior of the other party. They state that an individual will form judgments based on the filters of their own lived experiences and they will experience these judgments as the truth of the situation. To address this, Mangiofico and Tompkins (2021) proposed a five-step dialogic approach to help individuals engage in mutual sensemaking to combat the siloed meaning-making that each party is unilaterally imposing on the situation. The five steps walk the parties through exploring the perceived meaning of each party, disrupting the narrative by inviting each party to consider alternate interpretations of the situation, mutual re-framing to co-create meaning, co-creating a relational future, and finally reflection on the process. They claim that this process addresses the challenges of the incivility spiral by providing a process for rational, mutual sensemaking. The current paper sought to understand how such a dialogic intervention may be helped or hindered by the levels of awareness about their own sensemaking that each party brings into the process.

Lieberman (2022) agreed that we tend to experience our subjective judgments as being true and suggested a reason for why that is. Lieberman (2022) refers to the sensemaking process as pre-reflective subjective construal, meaning it feels to the individual like they are simply seeing reality, not constructing meaning. Lieberman (2022) posits that such perceptions create interpersonal conflict because they are not

always accurate and they are often different from the assessments of reality that others have. This creates *naïve realism*, a belief that one's own perceptions are an objective and rational judgment of what is and that conflicting perspectives of others must therefore be irrational. One may agree to question one's thinking, but not one's seeing. According to Leiberman (2021), one's understanding of the world tends to feel more like seeing than thinking. A consequence of this is that human beings often mistake ambiguous situations (such as the motives for why a co-worker acted in a specific way) as being non-ambiguous. This thesis investigated the extent to which self-awareness, especially around the subjective nature of how one constructs meaning, may mitigate interpersonal conflicts that arise when two parties have competing perceptions of reality.

Leiberman (2021) explains that because of how our brains evolved with a bias against tension, once a subjective construal is formed, the brain actively resists contradictory data. This explains why often neither party in a conflict can accept the other's different interpretation of what is going on between them. The current research supports the idea that intentional perspective-taking, as encouraged by Mangiofico and Tompkins (2021) with their dialogic process of mutual sensemaking, could be necessary to help individuals break out of their naïve realism.

Barki and Hartwick (2001) hypothesized that the problem-solving style of conflict management would reduce interpersonal conflict by virtue of leading to integrative win-win solutions. They further hypothesized that asserting (due to one-way solutions or deadlocks) and avoiding (leading to lack of resolution) styles would result in more interpersonal conflict. Both hypotheses were supported in their study. Barki and Hartwick

(2001) considered whether this might also be true in reverse – that higher or lower levels of interpersonal conflict could influence which conflict management style was used.

Building on Rusbolt and Zembrodt's (1983) model for conflict management, much literature has described conflict management strategies on the two dimensions of constructive-destructive and active-passive (Birditt et al., 2005; Birditt & Fingerman, 2005; Davis et al., 2004). These dimensions yield four conflict management strategies: active-constructive, active-destructive, passive-constructive, and passive-destructive. The constructive-destructive dimension refers to the positive or negative impact of the conflict strategy on the relationship, and the active-passive dimension refers to confronting or avoiding the conflict (Birditt & Fingerman, 2005).

This literature review explored how self-awareness of the subjective construal process during interpersonal conflict may correlate with a greater willingness to step outside of naïve realism and consider the viewpoints of the other. While there was scant research on self-awareness of subjective construal, Eurich (2018) produced an assessment measuring internal and external self-awareness, which contributed to this thesis. The current thesis explores if self-awareness leads to a higher probability of using the integrative and expanding conflict management strategy of problem-solving. Further, it sought to understand if self-awareness about one's subjective construal makes one more likely to use an active-constructive conflict management strategy as opposed to passive or destructive strategies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Methods

This research investigated the relationship between self-awareness of one's subjective construal process and one's effectiveness in managing interpersonal conflict at work. This chapter describes the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis procedures, and protection of human subjects.

Research Design

The research design for this study was a mixed-method approach. Data were collected two times. Initially, participants took a quantitative self-assessment survey measuring their general level of self-awareness, as well as their awareness of subjective construal. They were given a quantitative self-assessment survey measuring their effectiveness at handling interpersonal conflict at work. Simultaneously, the same conflict survey was given to between 2-10 colleagues of each participant to provide a 360 view of their conflict management effectiveness at work. After the survey data was reviewed, survey respondents were invited to participate in an interview about their experience of interpersonal conflict at work via web conference.

Participants

Participants were adults who were currently employed and had at least 10 colleagues. The surveys were offered to qualifying members of various Facebook and LinkedIn groups. Finally, the surveys were offered to qualifying members of my Master's cohort and to my qualifying connections on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used to collect data for this research: a self-awareness survey, a conflict effectiveness 360-degree survey, and an interview.

Self-Awareness Survey

The purpose of the self-awareness survey was to understand the participants' level of emotional self-awareness around how they make meaning, especially during conflict episodes. The self-assessment survey of self-awareness (Appendix A) was grounded in the EI and self-awareness research of Goleman (2007) and Eurich (2018). It was designed to be completed in 5-8 minutes and measured both general self-knowledge, as well as the participants' understanding of the subjective nature of how they construct meaning. It was important to understand the participants' level of self-awareness relative to other participants to determine if there is a correlation between the relative level of self-awareness and relative effectiveness in navigating conflict constructively. There were three sources of questions in the survey:

1. The survey used six questions derived from the *Global Emotional Intelligence Test* offered by the Global Leadership Foundation™, which contains 40 questions and is based on Goleman's (2007) four-quadrant EI Competency Model.

2. The survey used six Likert scale questions ranging from Very Untrue to Very True derived from the self-awareness quiz in *Insight* (Eurich, 2017), which is a small subset of Eurich's validated 70-item self-awareness assessment.

3. The survey used six questions (one Likert scale and five forced choice) formulated by me to fill in gaps in data collection not covered by the existing survey instruments.

Conflict Effectiveness 360-Degree Survey

The conflict effectiveness survey included both a self-assessment and a peer-rated component. As a potential additional data point relating to self-awareness, it was

important to understand the delta between the participants' perceived level of effectiveness in navigating conflict and how others see the participants' skills in this area. The purpose of this survey (Appendix B) was to uncover if there was a correlation between conflict effectiveness and self-awareness. The survey was designed to be completed in five minutes.

Interview Protocol Guide

An eight-question interview guide (Appendix C) was formulated to collect qualitative data from survey participants. The purpose of the questions was threefold:

1. Self-development work: The survey questions sought to uncover the role of self-development work in raising one's self-awareness. It was important to understand the role that training or self-directed personal development work plays in raising one's self-awareness to determine the potential efficacy of OD interventions focused on raising clients' self-awareness.

2. Use of self-awareness: The survey questions sought to understand if and how self-awareness is being used during conflict. It was important to understand if and how participants were using their self-awareness to inform how they behave during interpersonal conflict at work to determine the potential of increased self-awareness to improve one's skills in navigating conflict.

3. Comfort and confidence: The interview questions sought to uncover if there was a correlation between self-awareness levels and comfort and confidence levels during interpersonal conflict at work.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection from the surveys was complete, mean scores were calculated and participants were identified on a range of low to high self-awareness relative to other participants. Additionally, participants that elected to obtain peer ratings in addition to their self-ratings received a relative conflict effectiveness report showing their self-rated and peer-rated scores relative to other participants in the study. This report also showed participants the delta between their answers and the answers of their peer raters on a question-by-question basis, providing helpful self-knowledge to participants.

In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative findings collected during the interviews were analyzed for common themes and used to understand if and how participants with high self-awareness (relative to others) were using that awareness during interpersonal conflict at work and, if so, what impact it was having. The qualitative data was used as a supplement to answer the following research questions:

1. Are individuals with higher self-awareness more effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work?

2. Do individuals with higher self-awareness of how they make meaning consciously use that self-knowledge during interpersonal conflict situations at work?

3. Does formal training in self-development work impact in-the-moment self-awareness during interpersonal conflict such that the person is better able to handle interpersonal conflict at work?

Protection of Human Subjects

Approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and no research data was gathered prior to securing IRB approval.

Additionally, I completed Human Subjects Training on September 27, 2021 from the

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program).

      The survey instruments included a disclaimer informing participants that taking

part in the research was voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the study

at any time if they were uncomfortable. Participants were told at the start of the interview

sessions that they could choose not to answer any questions that made them

uncomfortable and that they could end the interview and remove themselves from the

study at any time. All participant and multi-rater responses were kept confidential and

only aggregated data is reported in the results of this study. Research data is kept securely

on my laptop and protected by a password.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

This thesis sought to understand the role of self-awareness around one's meaning making in how interpersonal conflict is handled at work. The research explored if those with higher awareness around this process would be able to handle conflict more effectively than those in the study with relatively lower levels of awareness. Self-awareness was based on a self-assessment in handling interpersonal conflict at work; participants were also tasked with gaining an assessment from 2-10 work colleagues.

This chapter presents the findings of this research. The quantitative data that was gathered from the surveys is presented first and is followed by the qualitative data that was gathered from 11 face-to-face interviews. Finally, the chapter will present findings and key learnings from both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data – Survey Results

Each subject filled out two surveys. The first survey asked questions about self-awareness, including awareness about the way they subjectively construct meaning. The second survey asked questions about behavior, comfort, and effectiveness during interpersonal conflict at work. The same conflict survey was also given to colleagues of the subjects to determine how others perceived the subjects' conflict effectiveness.

Once the subjects' self-assessments and peer-rated data were collected, three mean scores were calculated, one for each self-assessment and one for the peer-rated survey. For the 11 forced-choice questions in the self-awareness survey, answers were coded with a one or a zero, where a one indicated awareness and a zero indicated lack of awareness. The seven Likert scale questions were coded with the following scores: very true = 1, somewhat true = .67, somewhat untrue = .33, and very untrue = 0. Questions 7-12, which were focused on awareness of the way the subject subjectively makes meaning,

were double-weighted. All eight questions in the conflict effectiveness survey were

forced choice and were coded with a one or a zero, where a one indicated effective

conflict skills and a zero indicated ineffective conflict skills.

There were 13 participants in the study. Eleven of 13 participants provided

contact information for their peers so that they could receive multi-rater data. Two

participants chose to only participate in the self-assessment surveys and therefore do not

have multi-rater data. Table 1 lists the results by Subject.

Table 1

Self-Awareness and Conflict Effectiveness Scores

Subject	Self-Awareness Score	Self-Rated Conflict Score	Multi-Rater Conflict Score	Number of Multi-Raters
Subject A	0.99	0.75	0.875	$n = 4$
Subject B	0.945	1.00	1.00	$n = 3$
Subject C	0.875	0.75	0.81	$n = 10$
Subject D	0.875	0.875	*null*	$n = 0$
Subject E	0.82	0.875	0.84	$n = 8$
Subject F	0.82	1.00	1.00	$n = 8$
Subject G	0.79	0.75	1.00	$n = 4$
Subject H	0.75	0.50	0.85	$n = 10$
Subject I	0.74	1.00	1.00	$n = 3$
Subject J	0.71	1.00	0.83	$n = 6$
Subject K	0.67	0.625	*null*	$n = 0$
Subject L	0.64	0.125	0.86	$n = 10$
Subject M	0.53	1.00	0.81	$n = 2$
Mean	**0.780**	**0.738**	**0.899**	
Total				$N = 68$

Qualitative Data – Individual Interviews

After completing the surveys, all subjects were invited to participate in a follow-

up interview to which agreed. After the interviews, the data were reviewed and compared

with the quantitative survey data. The interview data consisted of the subjects' answers to

eight main interview questions and 13 potential follow-up questions.

The data are reported in three parts based on three different types of questions that were asked. The first section includes data about beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to the subjects' experience with interpersonal conflict at work. The next section includes data on what the subjects believe is the role of subjective interpretation during interpersonal conflicts at work. Finally, the last section includes data about formal self-development training and the role the subjects believe that training plays in how they handle and experience conflict today.

Questions About Beliefs, Feelings, and Behaviors During Conflict

Questions 1 – 5 and their associated follow-up questions were designed to understand what the subjects believe about conflict and how they tend to feel and act during interpersonal conflict at work. In some instances, the number of occurrences is higher than the number of participants because some subjects gave multiple answers to a single question.

Question 1 and follow-up questions asked subjects how they typically handle interpersonal conflict at work, what strategies they employ, and what strategies they believe are most effective. Eight respondents said they do not handle it immediately. Four take time to strategize, three take time to decide if the conflict is worth addressing, and of those three, two prefer to "sweep it under the rug" if addressing is not deemed necessary. In contrast, four respondents mentioned the importance of not letting conflict "fester," with one respondent saying, "avoiding it doesn't make it go away." Seven respondents do some form of perspective-taking to understand the other party's position or to confirm if their own understanding is accurate. Seven respondents choose to address the conflict directly in a one-on-one meeting rather than over email or another written medium. One

respondent said they always choose to let their supervisor address it with the other person's supervisor instead of handling it themselves.

Question 2 and follow-up questions asked subjects about their comfort level during interpersonal conflict during work. Eight respondents reported being uncomfortable, with one respondent saying they are comfortable and one saying it depends. This was an interesting contrast to the quantitative data where only six subjects said they were uncomfortable during conflicts. Four subjects reported being uncomfortable during conflicts in both the survey and the interview and one subject reported being comfortable during conflicts in both formats. Four of the people who reported being comfortable during interpersonal conflicts in the survey said during the interviews that they were uncomfortable during interpersonal conflict and used statements like "definitely uncomfortable" and "very uncomfortable and anxious."

Question 3 asked respondents what they think the cause is of their interpersonal conflict at work. Three respondents attributed conflicts to differing expectations or perspectives between themselves and another person. Four respondents gave answers that were focused on the other person in the conflict and did not include any agency on their part. For example, one respondent said "I do think there's an element of jealousy there. The other element that causes it is just ego, right? If I have a differing perspective, it's when people take that personally." One person said the cause is when their intentions are misunderstood, one said when a task conflict is not resolved, and another said it happens when they feel distrusted because their decisions are being questioned by their superiors.

Question 4 and follow-up questions asked respondents to compare their interpersonal conflict skills with those of other people they have worked with. Six

respondents said they were better than average, two said they were average, and two said they were below average. The reasons given for success varied. Some said being comfortable and calm helped, some said being direct was the key, and some said years of experience was the answer. Interestingly, one respondent reported that their discomfort was the key to success because it made them more diplomatic, and one claimed their avoidance and outsourcing of conflict to their manager made them effective because it avoided awkwardness.

Question 5 asked respondents about the feelings they experience during an interpersonal conflict incident at work. Anxious and uneasy was the most common response with five respondents giving that answer. Two reported being angry and three listed physical sensations such as a visceral knot in the stomach/gut, being shaky, and having a racing heart. The only neutral response to this question was one subject that reported feeling "surprised" when confronted with interpersonal conflict at work.

Overall, these interview questions indicated a high level of discomfort and negative emotions with interpersonal conflict at work and called into question the data about comfort level that came out of the quantitative surveys. Despite this discomfort, these interview questions also showed that most of the participants felt effective and reported using direct and non-avoidant strategies to address interpersonal conflict at work. Themes and example quotes from this section are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

How Subjects Believe, Feel, and Act During Interpersonal Conflict at Work

How Conflict is Handled	Comfort During Conflict	Why Conflict Happens (to the Subject)	Comparing the Subjects Conflict Skills to Others	How the Subject Feels During Conflict
Take time to strategize and/or make meaning before handling: "*Why do I feel this way? Am I being fair?*"	Lack of comfort: "*Clearly uncomfortable*" "*Very uncomfortable*" "*it is really wildly uncomfortable.*" "*Definitely uncomfortable*" "*I don't like it. It is uncomfortable for me.*"	Attribute it to something about the other person: "*...there's an element of jealousy there...If I have a differing perspective, it's when people take that personally.*" "*It's tough because when you're dealing with interpersonal conflict, you're dealing with someone's personality...you can try everything...but are you really going to change someone's personality?*"	Mostly better: "*I would like to think better.*" "*Pretty good at it.*" "*Pretty high...my dislike of conflict makes me diplomatic.*" "*Doing a pretty darn good job.*" "*If you're addressing it...just becomes even more awkward as far as I'm concerned...I haven't seen anything that works better than my particular method.*"	Anxious / Uneasy: "*I feel uneasy and unsettled.*" "*Very anxious, just not good.*" "*This anxiety, it's very visceral in my gut.*" "*Very anxious, I feel backed into a corner.*" "*I feel high anxiety and worry, and shame over I'm not doing well enough.*" "*...paranoid, anxious, I catastrophize it.*"
Engage in perspective taking to understand the other's position: "*I ask myself why the other person might be bringing this negativity.*"		Feeling mis-understood or disrespected: "*When someone else doesn't see me or my intentions how I see them.*"		Annoyed / Angry: "*Are we really here again?*" "*I feel angry.*"
Take time to decide if it is worth it to address it and ignore it if not: "*It's just his personality type. It's not me.*"		Differing expectations, opinions, or perspectives: "*Everyone has their own experiences and everyone is coming from a different place.*"		Physical sensations: "*...heart races, everything gets blurry.*" "*This anxiety, it's very visceral in my gut.*" "*...knot in the stomach, get flushed*" "*tightness in the stomach, hands shaky*"
Address it directly and honestly in a one on one meeting: "*Avoiding it doesn't make it go away.*" "*Don't let it fester!*"				Surprised: "*Mainly surprise that it's happening since it's so rare in recent years.*"

Questions About the Role of Subjective Interpretation in Interpersonal Conflict

Question 6 asked about the role of interpretation in impacting the subjects' emotions during interpersonal conflict at work and how conscious they are in the moment of the subjective nature of their interpretation. Seven respondents stated that interpretation has a strong impact on how they feel during conflict. One participant said, "It 100 percent effects it" and another said, "It totally effects it; I feel how I feel because of my interpretations." Two subjects specifically called out that if they have a negative history with someone, that will impact how they interpret that person's actions in the present. Two respondents said they are mostly or very aware of how they are making meaning in the moment, while three said they are somewhat aware or try to be aware, and two said they are not aware in the moment.

Question 7 asked respondents how much agency they feel they have in the moment to choose how they interpret the situation amid an interpersonal conflict at work. Six respondents reported a high level of agency and four said that it is difficult in the moment or that it requires effort. Two indicated that it depends on the situation and that a negative history with the person makes it harder to shift their default interpretation since it feels very true based on history.

Overall, these questions showed that most research participants agreed that how they feel and interpret a situation during an interpersonal conflict at work is within their control. The themes and example quotes for these questions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Impact of Subjective Interpretation and Agency Interpretation

Impact of Subjective Interpretation on Emotions During Interpersonal Conflict at Work	Amount of Agency Subjects Have to Choose How to Interpret the Situation During Interpersonal Conflict at Work
Strong Impact: "*Totally effects it. I feel how I feel because of my interpretations.*" "*It's all about it.*" "*Affirms for me that I'm validated to be mad.*" "*If you feel wronged, it's always in the eye of the beholder.*" "*100 percent impacts it.*"	High Level of Agency: "*The choice is all mine.*" "*A fair amount of control. Maybe not short term in the instant...but I choose how to handle by understanding the other's perspective.*" "*…can choose to interpret in a neutral way, 100 percent my control.*" "*…a high degree. There's nuance to choose how I want to interpret a situation. I can choose not to be offended.*"
Past experience impacts current interpretations: "*If someone has wronged me in the past, it impacts it.*" "*If I have a poor relationship or I don't like someone, it they oppose my initiative I interpret it as they are doing it for a personal reason.*"	Difficult in the Moment / Requires Effort: "*I just respond emotionally in the moment.*" "*If I believe they have painted a picture of me, I feel it's harder to choose how I feel since I'm working to counter-act that image they have.*" "*It requires conscious effort.*" "*I have full agency, but sometimes I have to battle emotions before I can make a choice.*"
Mostly or Very Aware (in the moment) of Impact of Interpretations on Emotions: "*...aware, and it helps me apply empathy in conflict situations.*" "*Very aware now, not very aware in the past.*"	
Try to be Aware / Somewhat Aware (in the moment) of the Impact of Interpretations on Emotions: "*I try to be conscious, but when triggered I don't notice I'm making assumptions.*" "*I try to put myself in the other person's shoes and see their perspective.*" "*I'm partially aware. I try to be quite consciously aware.*"	

Questions About the Role of Formal Self-Development Training on Conflict Outcomes

Question 8 and the associated follow-up questions was designed to understand how subjects see the impact of formal self-development training on their confidence, effectiveness, and emotional reactivity during interpersonal conflict at work.

Subjects reported having received a variety of formal training and had participated in self-development work. The training reported included therapy, coaching, leadership development programs, EI courses, self-help books, and relevant graduate programs that addressed understanding the self and how interpretations impact interpersonal relationships. Only one subject reported having no formal training of that kind and doing no self-development work. The other 10 all reported participating in at least two of the previously mentioned formal training or self-development work. Those 10 subjects reported the training as having a strong positive impact on their conflict effectiveness and how they experience conflict. Five said the training helped them build empathy and understanding for others' perspectives, five said they understand themselves and their own feelings better as a result, six felt their competence in handling conflict was improved, and four reported training helped them see value in addressing conflict.

When asked specifically about the impact of self-development work or training on their confidence during conflict, six participants said that it increased their confidence a lot. One subject stated, "I would have avoided conflict like nobody's business…now I have a lot more control of how I show up, so a lot more confidence dealing with it." Two pointed out that maintenance is important and that their skills can get rusty. Both subjects mentioned having a therapist, coach, or mentor to turn to for advice during conflict helps them apply what they have learned.

When asked about the impact on emotional reactivity, nine subjects said training and self-development work had a significant positive impact on their emotional reactivity during interpersonal conflict at work, making statements like "it's made me more aware of my whole self and less defensive." Three subjects gave the caveat that they still have the same initial emotional reaction, but the training and development work has helped them to "name it and tame it" in the moment so that they can choose how to respond rather than react out of the emotions.

Overall, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the formal training and self-development work that they had done had a positive impact on all elements of how they feel about and handle interpersonal conflict at work. The themes and example quotes for these questions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Impact of Training on Confidence, Effectiveness, and Emotional Reactivity

Impact of Training on Conflict Effectiveness	Impact of Training on Confidence During Conflict	Impact of Training on Emotional Reactivity During Conflict	Impact of Training on Life Overall
Strongly positive: "*I keep quotes from training in front of me. It helps me talk myself 'down the ladder' and keeps me from being defensive.*" "*I'm able to keep a clear head, respond logically and stay above the fray.*" "*It keeps me balanced, calm and non-reactive.*" "…*more competence for hard conversations.*" "*I live and breathe it. I use the skills every day.*" "*It has entirely shaped the way I handle interpersonal conflict.*" "*I learned to see things aren't black and white.*" "*It has helped me drastically…It was so amazing to see it work., and I've done it again with this particular person.*"	Increased a Lot: "*It helped me trust myself more.*" "*Definitely helped.*" "*It trained me to find my voice in conflict, because I had a tendency to shut down during conflict.*" "*It increased it a lot. I would have avoided conflict like nobody's business…now I have a lot more control of how I show up, so a lot more confidence in dealing with it. I still don't like it, but huge improvement all in all.*"	Significant Positive Impact: "*It helps me name it and tame it, and move through it not past it.*" "*It's made me more aware of my whole self and less defensive.*" "*I now realize people aren't doing things to me personally.*" "*I do a better job of being aware of my feelings and asking questions before reacting.*" "…*lowered it a lot because I have access to more stories quicker and I've trained myself to think about what stories might be true for the other person. So it creates more empathy and lowers my reactivity quite a bit.*"	Large Positive Impact: "*Makes me more aware of what's going on with me.*" "*EQ training made a lot of sense and I grew a lot.*" "*Huge impact in a positive way. It made me realize my accountability in the moment.*"
Built Empathy / Understanding for Other's Perspective: "*A couple things – learning how to understand what the other person wants was key.*" "*I learned to leave space for variance from my point of view.*" "*...helps me be aware…to understand where they are coming from*"		Handle Emotions Better: "*I'm not sure it impacts in the moment, but I've learned not to speak during the knee-jerk emotional reaction and I recover from that faster now.*" "*I think I've calmed down externally when talking to others, but internally still not calm.*" "*I'm calm in conflict, even when feeling anxiety inside.*"	
Understand Self and Reactions Better: "*It's made me more aware of my whole self and less defensive.*" "*I've learned conflict can be as fleeting as I make it.*" "*It gives me a 360 view of the situation and helps me understand my soul.*"			
See More Value in Addressing not Avoiding Conflict: "*The training showed me you have to deal with conflict and I see now that working through it helps me move into new harmony.*"			

Findings

Overall, there were five main findings from the quantitative surveys and the qualitative interviews. First, subjects rated their conflict skills lower than their peers rated them in the conflict surveys. The mean self-rated conflict score was 79%, while the mean score from the peer raters was 88%. Five subjects got a higher score from their peers than they gave themselves, three got lower scores, and three rated themselves the same. In the group rating themselves the same as their peer ratings, all three got 100% ratings from all their peer raters ($N = 14$) and gave themselves a 100% rating. One hundred percent of all peer raters ($N = 68$) rated the subject they were evaluating as "effective" rather than "ineffective" at handling interpersonal conflict at work. Two areas of difference between self-rated and peer-rated scores that stood out related to comfort and reactivity. All four subjects that rated themselves as "uncomfortable" during interpersonal conflict were perceived as being "comfortable" during interpersonal conflict by 100% of their peer raters ($N = 24$). Similarly, all four subjects that rated themselves as "reactive" during interpersonal conflict on the survey were perceived as "calm" during interpersonal conflict by 100% of their peer raters ($N = 23$).

Second, there were two areas of difference between self-rated and peer-rated data where subjects were more likely to rate themselves higher than their peers. The first pertained to seeking to be understood during an interpersonal conflict, versus seeking to understand the other person. Five subjects that rated themselves as seeking to understand rather than be understood during interpersonal conflict at work got disagreement from at least some of their peer raters. Overall 10 of 30 peer raters for these five subjects assessed them as seeking to be understood more than seeking to understand the other person. The second area where a significant number of subjects rated themselves higher than their

peers pertained to seeking to reconcile during interpersonal conflict versus seeking to win. Five of 11 subjects that said they seek to reconcile more than win got at least some disagreement from their peers. Overall, five of the 32 peer raters for these five subjects assessed them as focusing on winning rather than reconciling. Each of these five subjects had just one peer rater disagree with them on this question, so it represents a lower amount of disagreement than the previous example.

The third major finding was the correlation between self-awareness and conflict effectiveness was inconclusive. The three subjects with 100% conflict scores from both self-rating and peer raters were across the board in their self-awareness scores, landing in positions 2, 6, and 9 out of 13. It is important to note that all had positive self-awareness scores, but relative to the other subjects they did not stand out. Five subjects gave themselves a 100% conflict score, but this group had a clear divide in their peer-rated results. Three also got 100% scores from their peer raters ($N = 14$), but the other two subjects were both in the bottom three of scores from peer raters and in the bottom four of self-awareness scores. With the caveat that this is a very small sample size, there was anecdotal support for a correlation between low self-awareness and not seeing one's conflict effectiveness the same way others see it.

The fourth major finding was that conflict effectiveness and constructive conflict resolution practices did not necessarily correlate with a strong reduction in negative emotions during interpersonal conflict or a lack of discomfort. Overall, subjects reported having mostly effective conflict resolution practices, with seven seeking out the other's perspective, seven being direct rather than avoidant, seven dealing with the other person one on one, seven accepting responsibility for their subjective interpretations, and six

accepting that their view is not necessarily the only right view. Despite these positive strategies and practices, six participants reported being uncomfortable during interpersonal conflict on the surveys and eight said that they were uncomfortable during interpersonal conflict at work. Additionally, five reported feeling anxious or uneasy and three reported uncomfortable physical sensations during interpersonal conflict at work.

With the caveat of the small sample size, the final major finding was that there was strong support for a correlation between formal training that involved self-development work and one's perception of one's conflict effectiveness. All subjects that were exposed to this kind of training ($n = 10$) reported a strong positive impact on their overall approach to interpersonal conflict at work with nine saying it had a significant impact on reducing their emotional reactivity, six saying it increased the competence in dealing with conflict, six saying it improved their confidence a lot, five saying it gave them a better understanding of themselves, and five saying it improved their empathy and understanding for others.

Summary

This chapter presented the research findings. The quantitative findings, which were the result of two self-assessment surveys (self-awareness and conflict effectiveness) and one peer-rated survey (conflict effectiveness) were presented first. The mean self-awareness score was 78%, the mean self-rated conflict score was 73.8%, and the mean peer-rated conflict score was 89.9%. Thirteen subjects participated in the quantitative study, 11 of which also received peer ratings. Sixty-eight peers of these 11 subjects participated in the peer rating surveys.

The qualitative findings from 11 face-to-face interviews were then presented. All 13 subjects were invited to participate in an interview and 11 chose to do so. The interviews consisted of three categories of questions: how subjects feel, believe, and act during interpersonal conflict at work; how subjects understand the role of subjective interpretation during interpersonal conflict at work; and how subjects perceive the impact of formal training in self-development work on their conflict effectiveness.

After both quantitative and qualitative data were reported, five findings were shared. A key finding from the quantitative data was the delta between how subjects tended to rate themselves (lower) contrasted with how their colleagues tended to rate them (higher). Key findings from the qualitative data were a lack of support for a correlation between self-awareness and conflict effectiveness, a lack of strong correlation between conflict effectiveness and reduced negative affect during interpersonal conflict, and strong support for a correlation between formal self-development training and improved conflict effectiveness.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand the relationship between self-awareness and effectiveness at handling interpersonal conflict in the workplace, as well as the efficacy of personal development training to increase self-awareness and conflict effectiveness. Specifically, the research looked at self-awareness about one's subjective construal process (how one makes meaning) during interpersonal conflict, the impact of that awareness, and the role of personal development training to increase that kind of awareness. The study addressed three questions:

1. Are individuals with higher self-awareness more effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work?

2. Do individuals with higher self-awareness of how they make meaning consciously use that self-knowledge during interpersonal conflict situations at work?

3. Does formal training in self-development work impact in-the-moment self-awareness during interpersonal conflict such that the person is better able to handle interpersonal conflict at work?

Overall, subjects in this study tended to rate their own conflict skills lower than their colleagues and reported being mostly uncomfortable when dealing with interpersonal conflict at work. This pattern held across all levels of self-awareness despite the extensive amount of personal development training reported by most subjects. At the same time, almost all subjects reported receiving a very positive impact from their personal development work and credited it with making them more effective in handling conflict than they had been in the past. This led to an interesting finding that increased conflict

skills and better conflict outcomes were not strongly correlated with increased comfort when faced with interpersonal conflict at work.

Research Question 1

Are individuals with higher self-awareness more effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work? The data from this study did not support the conclusion that increased self-awareness was correlated with more effective handling of interpersonal conflict. A possible explanation for this is that the subjects in this study were a mostly homogenous group that had done extensive self-development training and had similar (and higher than expected) self-awareness scores. There was anecdotal support for a correlation between lower self-awareness scores (relative to others in the study) and subjects receiving a lower conflict effectiveness score from their colleagues than they had given themselves. This was not unexpected, as lower self-awareness generally could be anticipated to also show up in lower self-awareness about one's conflict skills compared to how those skills are perceived by others.

There were two survey questions about conflict effectiveness where subjects were most likely to view themselves in a more favorable light than their colleagues, calling into question their self-awareness in these areas. The first question was regarding if the subject sought to be understood versus sought to understand others during conflict. Subjects tended to see themselves as seeking to understand but got disagreement from some of their colleagues who perceived them as seeking to be understood instead. A potential area for future training could be how one can use active listening to understand their colleagues' viewpoints and to communicate that desire to understand.

The second question was regarding whether the subject sought to reconcile versus if they sought to win during an interpersonal conflict at work. While the delta between self-perception and colleague ratings was not as significant as in the previous example, all subjects who rated themselves as seeking to reconcile more than to win had a colleague that disagreed with them on this point. These two questions stand out as they are the only examples where colleagues tended to rate subjects lower than subjects rated themselves. A potential area for future study and development of self-awareness training could be overlaying the win-reconcile and the understood-understand continuums with the five conflict management strategies put forward in previous research (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; De Drue et al, 2001; De Dreu et al., 1999).

Research Question 2

Do individuals with higher self-awareness of how they make meaning consciously use that self-knowledge during interpersonal conflict situations at work? The data from the interviews supported the notion that individuals with awareness of their subjective construal process tended to feel a high level of agency over their experience during interpersonal conflict and indicated the way they made meaning strongly impacted their experience. They tended to state that it was within their power to make a choice about how to interpret a conflict situation (i.e., "Can choose to interpret in a neutral way"). They tended to report using awareness of the subjective nature of their interpretations to improve conflict outcomes (i.e., "Helps me apply empathy in conflict situations").

Due to the homogenous nature of study participants (almost all reported awareness of and agency in their own meaning making process), I was not able to compare these responses with a sample of subjects that are less aware of the role of subjective construal in creating the experience during conflict. A potential area for future

study would be to replicate the qualitative portion of this study with a group of subjects that have not had any self-development training and compare the two groups.

Research Question 3

Does formal training in self-development work impact in-the-moment self-awareness during interpersonal conflict such that the person is better able to handle interpersonal conflict at work? The support for self-development training impacting awareness and effectiveness during conflict was very strong (with the previous caveat of the small sample size). All subjects that had received self-development training in the past reported a strong positive impact from the training on how they handled conflict (i.e., "It has entirely shaped the way I handle interpersonal conflict"). Many of those subjects discussed the improvements (as they saw them) from how they had dealt with conflict in the past versus how they handled it after the self-development work. Additionally, most subjects reported that the training notably increased their confidence during conflict (though as previously noted, not their comfort level). Another area of conflict to reportedly benefit from self-development work was emotional reactivity, which nine subjects stated was significantly improved by the training.

Given the wide variety of self-development training that the subjects had received, and the fact that all but one subject had done multiple types of training, the study did not reveal what types of training led to these outcomes. Some further research questions that would be interesting to study and could shed some light on the specifics of what makes the training effective could be:

1. How much training is needed to be impactful? How frequently does training need to be refreshed to have a continuing impact?

2. Which specific types of self-development training are most helpful in improving experience and outcomes during interpersonal conflict?

3. What are the personal or professional attributes of employees that are most likely to be positively impacted by this training? In what circumstances or work environments is the training most likely to be effective?

Limitations of the Study

This study had three limitations. The first limitation was the homogeneity of the subject pool. I used a convenience sample drawn from my network, which resulted in most subjects having had a consequential amount of self-development work. This may have worked in the study's favor when investigating how subjects used self-development work to improve their experiences and outcomes during interpersonal conflict, but without a control group of subjects who had not had this training, there was no basis for comparing this group with the general population.

The second limitation was the small sample size used in the study. Due to the sensitive nature of interpersonal conflict at work, and the requirement of asking one's colleagues to rate one's conflict skills, I was not able to recruit as many research subjects as anticipated. A much larger and more diverse sample size would be needed to generalize the findings to a broader population and create OD interventions.

The third limitation was the subjective nature of the data gathered. Subjects assessed themselves in the two surveys and gave their subjective opinions of themselves during the interviews. The peer-rated survey was meant to be a check on the subjects' self-ratings; however, the peer reviews were also subjective. It is possible that a negative rating from a colleague could be influenced by that colleague's previous biases towards the subject, by their personal relationship with them, or by their own issues with conflict

that filter how they interpret the subject's conflict behavior. Positive ratings could be similarly influenced by a close friendship with the subject.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study would benefit from being replicated with a larger and more diverse sample of participants. This would allow a future researcher to put subjects in buckets based on their survey answers and then compare the interview question responses between the different buckets of study participants. Creating a delta between those with little or no self-development work and those with a significant amount of self-development work would help organizations and OD practitioners understand what the expected impact of this kind of OD intervention could be.

It would be advantageous to create an improved and validated self-awareness scale that focuses on two types of awareness: how one's conflict skills are viewed by others (pulled from the comparison of self-rated and peer-rated conflict skills) and one's awareness and acceptance of the subjective nature of how humans construct meaning. This would be an improvement over the self-awareness instrument used in this survey that also included general self-awareness questions which were less relevant to the issue being studied than awareness of one's subjective construal.

Finally, an expanded study with additional research questions would allow OD practitioners to parse which specific self-development training is most impactful on interpersonal conflict at work and what variables impact the efficacy of this kind of training. This study viewed the term self-development training broadly and was inclusive of whatever subjects defined for themselves as self-development training. Future studies would benefit from identifying the most appropriate types of development training to study further.

Summary

 This chapter summarized the results and findings of the three research questions from the study and discussed the implications of each. Two main limitations of the study were presented, as well as three recommendations for future research. This study has contributed to research on the role of self-awareness in conflict effectiveness. Given the enormous costs to businesses and individuals of interpersonal conflict at work, it would be advantageous to continue to research how the field of OD can contribute to mitigating these costs through effective personal-development training programs.

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Appendix A: Self-Awareness Survey

Some questions derived from *The Insight Quiz* (Dr. Tasha Eurich) and the *Emotional Intelligence Test* (Global Leadership Foundation™), and used with permission.

This study deals with the topics of self-awareness and interpersonal conflict. Participation in this survey and research project overall is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are free to exit the study and have your data removed from the results.

1. My emotions generally have:
   a. A strong impact on the way I behave
   b. Little or no impact on the way I behave

2. I am always:
   a. Flexible in how I see events
   b. Able to see events for what they are

3. I always:
   a. Listen to the important words being said
   b. Listen well and am attentive to emotional cues

4. Others' perspectives are always:
   a. Understood and sensitively shown
   b. Clouding the issues and getting us off track

5. I always communicate in a way:
   a. That everyone understands what I am saying
   b. That seeks mutual understanding and full information sharing

6. I always handle difficult people:
   a. In a straight forward and direct manner
   b. With diplomacy and tact

7. When someone or something upsets me:
   a. It is the action or situation *itself* that causes me to be upset
   b. It is *how I feel* about the action or situation that causes me to be upset

8. When I am emotionally upset:
   a. I tend to react instinctively in the moment
   b. I tend to respond thoughtfully

9. When I am upset with someone:
   a. I tend to assume my evaluation of their actions and motives are accurate
   b. I tend to assume my evaluation of their actions and motives could be inaccurate

10. How I see the world is:

    a. The objective truth about way the world is
    b. Just one interpretation among many valid ways to see the world

11. When involved in an interpersonal conflict, my assessment of the situation:
    a. Is based on the objective facts in front of me
    b. Is based on how I make meaning out of what I observe

12. I am aware of what kind of situations tend to upset me emotionally.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

13. I have clearly defined values that outline what is important to me.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

14. My values drive how I approach the world.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

15. I can generally predict how I will behave in a given situation.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

16. I can see themes in how I tend to behave.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

17. I am aware of the impact my actions have on those around me.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

18. When interacting with people, I examine how they respond to me.
    a. Very untrue
    b. Untrue
    c. Somewhat untrue
    d. Somewhat true
    e. True
    f. Very true

Appendix B: Conflict Effectiveness Survey

Conflict Effectiveness Survey (Self-Assessment)

This study deals with the topics of self-awareness and interpersonal conflict. Participation in this survey and research project overall is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are free to exit the study and have your data removed from the results.

This survey measures one's effectiveness in handling interpersonal conflict at work. Please answer based on how you *usually* feel and behave during interpersonal conflict *at work*. Please choose just one sentence in each pair.

For purposes of this survey, interpersonal conflict is defined as an interpersonal interaction with one or more people at work that *you* judge to be negative or unpleasant.

One:

I am usually effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work.

I am usually ineffective at handling interpersonal conflict at work.

Two:

I have more interpersonal conflict at work than most people.

I have less interpersonal conflict at work than most people.

Three:

I am usually comfortable in work situations involving interpersonal conflict.

I am usually uncomfortable in work situations involving interpersonal conflict.

Four:

I usually address interpersonal conflict at work in a direct and straight forward manner.

I usually avoid addressing interpersonal conflict at work.

Five:

I am usually emotionally reactive during interpersonal conflict at work.

I usually remain calm during interpersonal conflict at work.

Six:

I am usually open to others' opinions during interpersonal conflict at work.

I am usually closed off to the opinions of others during interpersonal conflict at work.

Seven:

I am usually most interested in winning during interpersonal conflict at work.

I am usually most interested in reconciling during interpersonal conflict at work.

Eight:

I usually focus on being understood during interpersonal conflict at work.

I usually focus on understanding the position of others during interpersonal conflict at work.

<div align="center">Conflict Effectiveness Survey (Multi-Rater)</div>

This survey measures one's effectiveness in handling interpersonal conflict at work. Please answer based on how you have observed the person you are rating *usually* behaving during interpersonal conflict *at work*. Please choose just one sentence in each pair.

For purposes of this survey, interpersonal conflict is defined as an interpersonal interaction between two or more people that *you as an observer* judge to be negative or unpleasant.

Your responses in this survey are anonymous and your name will not be connected with your responses. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are free to exit the study and have your answers removed from the results.

One:

This person is usually effective at handling interpersonal conflict at work.

This person is usually ineffective at handling interpersonal conflict at work.

Two:

This person appears to have more interpersonal conflict at work than most people.

This person appears to have less interpersonal conflict at work than most people.

Three:

This person usually appears comfortable in work situations involving interpersonal conflict.

This person usually appears uncomfortable in work situations involving interpersonal conflict.

Four:

This person usually addresses interpersonal conflict at work in a direct and straight forward manner.

This person usually appears to avoid addressing interpersonal conflict at work.

Five:

This person usually appears to be emotionally reactive during interpersonal conflict at work.

This person usually appears to remain calm during interpersonal conflict at work.

Six:

This person usually appears to be open to the others opinions during interpersonal conflict at work.

This person usually appears to be closed off to the opinions of others during interpersonal conflict at work.

Seven:

This person usually appears to be interested in winning during interpersonal conflict at work.

This person usually appears to be interested in reconciling during interpersonal conflict at work.

Eight:

This person usually appears to focus on being understood during interpersonal conflict at work.

This person usually appears to focus on understanding of the position of others during interpersonal conflict at work.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. When you have an interpersonal conflict at work, how do you typically handle it?
   a. What is your strategy?
   b. Please share a specific example.
   c. What do you believe is the most effective way to handle conflict at work?

2. How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel when an interpersonal conflict arises at work?
   a. What impacts that?

3. When you have interpersonal conflict at work, why do you think it happens? (Please elaborate.)

4. How would you compare your skills at navigating interpersonal conflict at work with the conflict skills of others?
   a. Please elaborate on why you believe that is the case.
   b. Please share a specific example.
   c. What do you think is the reason for your success (or lack of success) in navigating interpersonal conflict?

5. How do you typically feel when you have interpersonal conflict at work?
   a. How do you respond when you feel that way?
   b. How conscious are you in the moment of the role your interpretations play in determining your feelings and actions?

6. What role does your interpretation of events play in determining how you feel in a given situation? (Please elaborate.)

7. How much agency do you believe you have to choose how to interpret a situation? (Please elaborate.)

8. What kind of training have you had on how to understand your inner world, if any?
   a. What kind of self-development work have you done, if any?
      i. How has that impacted your life in general, if at all?
      ii. Please share a specific example.
   b. How has that impacted how you handle interpersonal conflict, if at all?
      i. Please share a specific example.
   c. How has it impacted your confidence in handling interpersonal conflict, if at all?
      i. Please share a specific example.
   d. How has it impacted your emotional reactivity during interpersonal conflict, if at all?
      i. Please share a specific example.