‘On the Frontier with Conflict Management: Assessing the Influence of a Preeminent Workplace System on Employment Relations and Conflict Resolution Theory’

Abstract

Over the past several decades the field of workplace conflict management has reoriented itself from a focus on dispute resolution in collective bargaining and non-union alternative dispute resolution procedures to that of systemic and strategic approaches to managing workplace conflict. The culmination of this development in the United States has been the Integrated Conflict Management System (ICMS). Introduced by a distinguished panel of U.S. academics and practitioners in 2001, it offers a proactive approach to organizational conflict through the coordinated provision of more alternative dispute resolution options and educational resources than is traditionally found within organizations.

This study is the first empirical investigation of a fully implemented ICMS. It researches the influence of what may likely be the most comprehensive ICMS in the United States: that of the U.S. Department of the Interior, the U.S. government’s land and cultural resources management agency. The Interior Department is one of few examples of large organizations that have fully adopted and continue to maintain ICMSs since the model was developed, even though such systems have been deemed best practices by scholars and practitioners for over a decade.

In this talk, I focus on my study’s findings regarding the relationship of the individual employee and the practice of organization development to the conflict management system. Based on a year of fieldwork using participant observation, ethnographic, and interview methods as well as historical and archival data, I find practitioners and employees within the system challenging assumptions and normative values embodied in the ICMS model that previously have been under-acknowledged in conflict management theory.

Please contact Val Jephcott: val.jephcott@wbs.ac.uk for further information