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ADVANCING DISPUTE RESOLUTION BY UNPACKING
THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT: TOWARD AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Organizational leaders, public policy makers, dispute resolution professionals, and scholars have developed diverse methods for resolving workplace conflict. But there is inadequate recognition that the effectiveness of a dispute resolution method depends on its fit with the source of a particular conflict. Consequently, it is essential to better understand where conflict comes from and how this affects dispute resolution. To these ends, this paper uniquely integrates scholarship from multiple disciplines to develop a multi-dimensional framework on the sources of conflict. This provides an important foundation for theorizing and identifying effective dispute resolution methods, which are more important than ever as the changing world of work raises new issues, conflicts, and institutions.

It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.
G.K. Chesterton (1932: 62)

Resolving workplace conflict is critically important and challenging. Yet in the dynamic 21st century world of work, dispute resolution has become more complex, and conflicts are often not isolated to issues arising only at the workplace. Pinpointing the roots of a conflict can be increasingly difficult, especially when there are multiple sources. For instance, a recent controversy surrounding the National Football League (NFL) over players kneeling during the U.S. national anthem in social protest against the treatment of African-Americans by the police involved myriad issues that were difficult to disentangle (Belson 2017). The complex nature of the conflicts that led to the NFL players' decisions to kneel during the anthem, and the responses of other athletes, team owners, the broader public, and even the American president, drew attention away from the players' interests, made disputes over the rights of players to engage in political expression at work that much more difficult to resolve, and led to numerous other conflicts.

Two seminal frameworks have significantly advanced our understanding of types of workplace conflict (Jehn 1997) and the structural nature of workplace disputes and approaches to their resolution (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg 1989). However, the NFL dispute reveals the limitations of these frameworks: it is not easily categorized as a task, process, or relationship conflict as in Jehn (1997), and it highlights that structural factors such as interests, rights, and power emphasized by Ury et al. (1989) are no more important than factors like emotion, disposition, identity, and communication. Missing from these frameworks and other important developments in the conflict and workplace dispute resolution literatures (Colvin 2016; Lipsky and Avgar 2004; Lipsky, Avgar, and Lamare 2016; Roche and Teague 2011), is an explicit

acknowledgement that effectively resolving a dispute requires: 1) recognizing that conflict has multiple, varied sources that go beyond structural issues;¹ 2) accurately diagnosing the source(s) of different conflicts; and 3) tailoring dispute resolution methods to address these underlying sources.

Suppose a manager believes that a dispute is preventing two co-workers from working together effectively. There could be many possible reasons for this dispute. Perhaps the two workers believe that they are competing for scarce resources, such as administrative support or a single promotion opening. Maybe the workers come from different cultural backgrounds and perceive a lack of respect for each other. Perhaps one had an emotional outburst that created lingering bad feelings. It could be the case that they disagree over tasks because they foresee different uses for a product they are developing. Maybe one or both of them face difficulties communicating. Maybe all (or none) of these causes underlie this particular dispute. Not all dispute or conflict resolution methods will be equally effective in these different scenarios. For a dispute resolution method to be successful, the parties must first understand the sources of the conflict to choose an appropriate solution. For instance, a dispute rooted in competition for scarce resources needs to be addressed differently than a miscommunication. A clash triggered by different interpretations of information needs to be handled differently than a personality conflict. Perhaps a clarifying rule is useful in resolving a conflict over administrative support, but not when there is miscommunication. A third party intervention might usefully address disputes based on information or personalities, but only if these underlying sources of the conflict are recognized by the third party. Adding to the need to carefully diagnose the source(s) of a conflict is that disputants might differ in their perceptions of the source(s) of their conflict. Finally, a

¹ See Kochan and Jick (1978) for an exception in the context of collective bargaining and Arrow et al. (1995) for an exception in the broader conflict resolution literature.

failure to diagnose and resolve the source(s) of a conflict can cause it to persist and become more complicated.

We argue that while significant attention has been devoted to understanding the effects of conflict and approaches to dispute resolution across academic disciplines and applied fields, the research tends to be splintered as scholars focus on particular types or sources of conflict, such as resource constraints in economics, interests, rights and other structural issues in industrial relations, power in sociology, framing and social identity in organizational behavior, personality and emotions in psychology, and miscommunication in communication studies. While the depth that comes from disciplinary focus is highly valuable, an integrated framework is also needed to better understand, diagnose, and resolve conflict in practice (see also, Mayer 2012; Moore 2014).

For instance, Zariski (2010: 219) has noted that most mediation models “continue to privilege one behavioral element and to ‘bracket’ or minimize the importance of the rest.” We submit that this narrowness is not limited to models of mediation, and that the best mediators intuitively understand that effective dispute resolution requires an accurate diagnostic assessment of the sources of conflict, coupled with tailoring interventions to address the root causes. We propose that greater attention needs to be paid to developing an analytical framework that fully reflects the breadth of factors that could possibly contribute to conflict. While the best dispute resolution professionals implicitly diagnose a particular dispute and tailor their interventions to address diverse root causes, an explicit, integrated framework is important for educating new dispute resolution professionals and quickening their learning curves, assisting managers and others who lack training or experience, and promoting reflection among experienced professionals. It can also raise new insights for academic research, encouraging greater cross-disciplinary pollination of ideas and approaches to studying conflict.

We define conflict as an apparent or latent opposition between two or more parties that results from differences that are either real or imagined, and seek to uncover the diverse causes of conflict. Our framework synthesizes the diverse sources of conflict into three multi-dimensional categories—structural, cognitive, and psychogenic (see Table 1). Structural conflicts are those that are caused by the relationship between the parties’ interests or goals, rights, and sources of power. These types of conflicts are frequently seen as contests over scarce resources, but the literature on conflict and dispute resolution often fails to recognize alternative perspectives on the specific nature of interrelated interests. In addition to the structural nature of a situation that can give rise to conflict, cognitive functioning over preferences, information, and communication can also cause conflict. Lastly, psychogenic conflict arises from the psychology of feelings or emotions: affective reactions to situations and other people including those triggered by individual personality traits or moods. In the remainder of our paper, we describe the dimensions of each of these three sources of conflict in more detail. We then apply our framework to re-analyze three classic case examples found in the conflict literature to demonstrate our unique contribution. We conclude with a brief discussion of how to manage conflict at its sources.

Structural Sources of Conflict

The interests or goals that potentially underlie a conflict can be diverse. One set of interests might involve economic resources to satisfy material needs and desires. Other goals might have a value orientation toward achieving certain outcome and procedural standards, such as fairness, inclusion, or respect. Another set of possible goals might derive from identity needs for a sense of purpose and meaning in one’s life (Mayer 2012). Identity needs can be tied to group affiliations, such as racial, ethnic, or religious affinities, and particularly difficult conflicts

result when group members see their collective needs for recognition, security, dignity, and flourishing threatened by other groups (Rothman 1997). For any interest or goal, structural conflicts are those that are caused by the relationship between the interests or goals of two or more people or organizations. We label this category “structural conflict” because the nature of these conflicts is determined by the rules, institutions, and practices in which this relationship is situated—in other words, by the structural nature of the relationship. To help understand the nature of structural conflict, we need to categorize the possible structures of these relationships. We present four different possible structures for the relationships between the interests or goals of the parties to a structural conflict (Budd and Colvin 2014).

We start with a relationship characterized by autonomous agents pursuing their self-interests largely as equals in relationships that are relatively easy to begin and end. A classic example is a worker looking to trade their labor with an organization in a perfectly competitive labor market. When the worker’s and organization’s interests coincide, they should contract with each other; if either side can get a better deal with someone else, then they won’t (continue to) contract with each other. A relationship between two workers might be seen in this same light when, for example, they can choose to work with each other when it serves their own interests and can otherwise choose not to without harming their careers. Owing to this focus on self-interest, we label this an egoist structure. Conflicts that arise from this structure pertain to the terms of exchange, including following through on what is agreed to.

Alternatively, consider relationships that are expected to be more enduring. One possibility is a relationship with strongly interdependent interests in which a long-term partnership provides the greatest returns to both sides when structured appropriately. In employment relations scholarship, an employment relationship in which employers and

employees have mutual interests that can be fully satisfied by both parties through well-designed, lasting human resource management policies is known as an unitarist employment relationship (Budd and Bhava 2010; Fox 1974). This unitarist perspective can be usefully generalized to relationships beyond the employer-employee focus of employment relations. That is, any relationship between two or more people or organizations could potentially be characterized by a unitarist structure in which long-term goals and interests are interdependent and not structurally determined to necessarily be incompatible. In this way, endemic or inherent conflicts of interest are de-emphasized or non-existent, at least in the ideal; rather, the focus is on a belief that the relationship is dominated by mutual interests that can be aligned to everyone's benefit.

There can still be conflict in such a situation because of suboptimal policies or practices, but the source of such conflict is then in these policies or practices rather than in the fundamental structure of the relationship, which has important implications for dispute resolution. Moreover, because a unitarist relationship is characterized by features that bind the parties together, there is value in trying to maintain rather than end the relationship, which has important implications for dispute resolution. Note further that unitarist relationships can often involve integrative or win-win negotiations because this can be a useful method of problem-solving focused on common interests (Walton and McKersie 1965; Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991). But integrative negotiations could also occur in other types of relationships, while integrative negotiations are not guaranteed to occur in an under-performing unitarist relationship. So a unitarist conceptualization should be seen as addressing a more fundamental issue (characterizing the structural nature of a relationship) than how to characterize a specific negotiation.

A polar alternative to a unitarist structure focusing on interest alignment is a relationship structure characterized by sharply antagonistic conflicts of interests. In order for such a

relationship to exist, there needs to be some degree of interdependent interests. As such, each side needs each other at least to some extent, but within the relationship, there is a win-lose structure such that gains for one side come at the expense of the other. At its simplest, the classic example is a relationship largely or completely characterized by a contest over scarce resources in which one's consumption of resources limits another's ability to consume these resources. But again, because of interdependent interests there needs to be at least some element of accommodation. So the relationship can be seen as one with tensions between control or dominance and accommodation.

This tension has been extensively theorized through Marxist and other critical scholarship on the employment relationship (Edwards 1990; Thompson and McHugh 2009). This scholarship further draws attention to the extent to which inequalities in the employment relationship are embedded in diverse elements of the structural context of the employment relationship. In classical Marxism, for example, employment relationship inequality is rooted in the ownership of the means of production, which is in turn created and furthered not only by economic advantages of capital over labor, but also through social, legal, and political advantages. Relatedly, social dominance theory in social psychology draws attention to the ways in which groups seek to maintain their dominance (Sidanius and Pratto 2011). Conflict between groups, broadly defined, might therefore stem from individuals with a high social dominance orientation (Pratto et al. 1994). These insights can be applied to the consideration of all relationships in diagnosing the nature of a conflict over scarce material or non-material resources. For example, a dispute involving a temporary, contract employee and a regular full-time employee, perhaps with civil service or other protections, might involve complex power differences rooted in diverse rules, institutions, practices, identities, and values. We label relationships that are characterized

primarily by conflicts of (broadly-defined) interests as antagonistic relationships, and recognize that the degree and sources of inequality in the relationship encompass a wide range of options.

A fourth possibility represents a mixture between the unitarist and antagonistic structures. That is, there can be longer-term relationships that have a mixture of interdependent interests in which some of the interests can be aligned (as in unitarist relationships) and some are opposed to each other (as in antagonistic relationships). Conflict is therefore mixed-motive conflict. To hold this relationship together, there needs to be some recognition of the other's opposing interests as legitimate; otherwise, it is an egoist relationship. As this type of relationship is characterized by a plurality of legitimately-recognized interests, we label this a pluralist structure. Unequal bargaining power is a key feature of a pluralist relationship and, as is also highlighted by the antagonistic model, we should fully diagnose the sources of power imbalances to understand the nature of a conflict in a pluralist structure. Mainstream U.S. employment relations scholarship embraces this pluralist structure as the most accurate representation of the contemporary employment relationship (Budd, Gomez, and Meltz 2004), but other workplace conflicts could also be situated in a pluralist structure if they are characterized by mixed-motive conflict.

The NFL player anthem dispute occurred in the context of a structural relationship between the various actors. Players, owners, and fans all have a shared interest in the success of the NFL, which requires motivated players, team cohesion, and a loyal fan base. Within this interdependent relationship, however, there are also competing interests, including differing preferences over whether the players should engage in social protests during an NFL game. This situation is therefore best seen as a pluralist relationship with mixed-motive conflict. The importance of the structural context of the player protests is further reflected in debates that

emerged over whether the players were protected under labor law as concerted action by employees (Scheiber 2017).

In sum, one key dimension of our integrated framework on the sources of conflict is the structural context, and there are four alternative structural possibilities of a relationship. Making these alternatives explicit provides a way to understand actor interdependencies and conflicts of interest, which helps actors diagnose the structural nature of a conflict, and become aware of their own and others' ideologies regarding conflict. As this last point suggests, the structural nature of a conflict can be real or imagined. That is, we can think of the structural alternatives as either characterizing the actual nature of a relationship, or as what the parties imagine it to be. Indeed, the true structural nature of a workplace dispute might not be able to be objectively determined. In this case, the key is understanding how the parties perceive the structural nature of their relationship, while also appreciating alternative ways for thinking about it—this requires a deeper understanding of the cognitive sources of conflict, which we outline next.

Cognitive Sources of Conflict

The previous section emphasized the structural causes of conflict, but actual and potential conflicts involve people—whether as individuals, members of groups, or representatives of organizations, countries, or other entities—who act and react cognitively and emotionally. The second part of our framework considers factors that cause or influence conflict that relate to cognitive functioning, including interpretation, perception, information processing, decision-making, and communication. Individuals may have different preferences or differences of opinion over how to interact or solve a problem, perhaps influenced by cultural or other differences. Conflicts can arise because individuals have access or pay attention to different

information, have differing or limited interpretations of the same information, or fail to communicate effectively. We outline each of these cognitive dimensions of conflict in turn.

Cognitive Frames and Preferences

Inside and outside of the workplace, people are confronted with numerous cognitive stimuli when they witness, experience, read, or hear things. To interpret this information-rich environment and give things meaning, the human brain develops and refines a knowledge structure or interpretative schema that provides a cognitive frame for decision-making and action (Cornelissen and Werner 2014; Walsh 1995). That is, how an individual perceives and reacts to things they see, read, or hear depends on their cognitive frame or frame of reference such that “frames shape how individual actors see the world and perceive their own interests” (Kaplan 2008: 732; Goffman 1974). And since perception can be an important element of conflict (Rogan 2006), cognitive frames are an important potential source of conflict.

To appreciate the role of cognitive frames in influencing conflict, it is important to recognize that each individual’s cognitive frame is a complex byproduct of their histories, including their culture, personal interactions, and accumulated experiences. So when organizational members have different cognitive frames, conflicts can arise because even the same problem, task, or piece of information can be interpreted differently and engender competing reactions and desired courses of action. For example, in response to an unexpected event faced by two or more parties, unique individual frames can create interpretative uncertainty “which leads to unexpected conflict about whether a relevant event occurred, how it is impacting the exchange, and/or how to respond to it” (Weber and Mayer 2014: 347). This can lead to further conflict because the parties might misinterpret the others’ responses—for example, one side might perceive the other side as acting opportunistically (Weber and Mayer 2014). At an

organizational level, cognitive frames shape how organizations are structured (Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980), so clashing frames can yield conflicts over the desired structural form. We can extend this to the desired structure of the employment relationship and other organizational relationships. The four structural relationship possibilities outlined earlier in the paper can also be seen as cognitive frames that shape how individuals interpret these relationships and clashes over the desired relationship can be rooted in the embrace of alternative frames.

Individual frames can differ in many ways. Based on past experiences, some individuals might prefer more conservative and risk-averse behaviors. Individuals might also have differing expectations regarding fairness and ethics. Some might have strong beliefs about distributive justice; others about procedural justice. Some might expect high ethical standards to be followed; others might be more instrumental in their preferred approach. Money can also be interpreted through alternative frames. For example, someone who interprets their salary as an indication of their self-worth is likely to react differently to pay differences than someone who sees their salary as determined by impersonal market forces.

Cultural differences can also be a source of conflict, and this can be rooted in culturally-influenced cognitive frames. Each individual's knowledge structure or interpretative schema develops over time as a person encounters information and organizes it. And since cognitive stimuli are experienced through the lens of one's culture, then there are important linkages between cognitive frames and culture (DiMaggio 1997). Indeed, research in cultural psychology uncovers significant cultural differences in beliefs over the importance of (a) effort or ability in determining outcomes, (b) self-enhancement motivations and thus the importance of "face", (c) the actions of others in determining one's choices, (d) conformity motivations, (e) individual

dispositions or social roles for attributing behavior, and (f) holistic or analytical approaches to forecasting future events (Heine and Ruby 2010). Each of these can be thought of as a cultural difference in the way one interprets information and action, and each of these differences can lead to conflict as individuals from different cultures have different expectations and interpretations. Moreover, culture does not only potentially create conflict, it also influences how individuals react to and handle conflict (Aslani et al. 2016; Tinsley 2001). Gender differences that lead to and/or shape reactions to conflict can be thought of in a similar fashion. There are many ways, then, in which differing worldviews, expectations, and preferences can lead to conflicts in the workplace and beyond.

(Limited) Information Processing

The human brain's limited capacity to retain information and to process it consistently can also cause or influence conflict. There are ongoing debates over how the mind actually works. Two leading theories are that the mind consists of specialized, domain-specific modules (Barrett and Kurzban 2006) or of two systems of mental processes—a fast, intuitive, heuristic system and a slower, analytical reasoning system (Evans 2008). There are complicated debates within and across these theories (Eraña 2012), but at a general level, both theories point toward a human brain that is not unitary or always internally consistent. So conflicts can arise because individuals perceive the same problem differently, such as when one uses a heuristic and another approaches it analytically. Individuals can also be motivated to process information in ways that validate preexisting beliefs, rather than by a search for accuracy (Ledgerwood, Callahan, and Chaiken 2014); again, differing levels of motivation can cause individuals to make differing interpretations and thus find themselves in conflict with each other. Indeed, dual process theories of cognition imply that individuals can even have multiple reactions to the same phenomenon—

such as a worker who says money isn't important when considered deliberately, but then instinctively declines to do something that doesn't contain an extrinsic reward—which makes conflict across individuals more likely because of perceived inconsistencies in behavior. Individuals may also have different reactions to an issue depending on whether it is seen as affecting themselves or someone else, and these reactions can further be shaped by the amount of mental effort used (Paharia, Vohs, and Deshpandé 2013).

These models of cognitive limitations underlie the behavioral economics principle of bounded rationality (Brocas and Carrillo 2014). Rather than seeing individuals as extensively and carefully evaluating each situation, bounded rationality means that individuals will use heuristics to overcome cognitive difficulties in fully handling information processing, memory, and multi-tasking. Many of these heuristics are now well-recognized in psychology and behavioral economics, and are often labeled “cognitive biases” because they systematically appear to fall short of the decisions that would result from a careful assessment of each situation (Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Thompson and Lucas 2014). Common types of cognitive bias that result in conflict include loss aversion, anchoring, framing, fixed-pie perception, exaggeration of conflict, illusions of transparency, decision fatigue, and overconfidence. In sum, conflicts can arise because “the central characteristic of agents is not that they reason poorly but that they often act intuitively” and because “the behavior of these agents is not guided by what they are able to compute, but by what they happen to see at a given moment” (Kahneman 2003: 1469).

(In- and Out-)Group Perceptions

Cognitive processing does not occur in a social vacuum. Teams, for example, are mainstays of organizational life, and at a more fundamental level humans tend to identify with

certain groups, whether on the basis of employer, occupation, race, religion, or myriad other dimensions. Social identity theory highlights the importance of group identification because humans “need to feel positive about themselves (self enhancement), and...to feel certain about themselves, their place in the world, and how they relate to other people (uncertainty reduction)” (Hogg 2013: 554). To derive these benefits, individuals magnify the differences between their own groups and alternative groups, emphasizing the positive aspects of their in-groups and the negative aspects of out-groups, while also acting to maintain these differences.

This can lead to a variety of intergroup conflicts. Realistic group conflict theory emphasizes conflicts between groups over scarce resources (Sherif 1966). But social identity theory implies that intergroup conflict does not require a conflict of interest. Indeed, while overt discrimination requires intergroup interaction, other intergroup problems such as stereotyping, prejudice, stigmatizing, and implicit bias do not require interaction (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Cognitive biases can reinforce these intergroup differences, such as attributing undesirable out-group behaviors to negative personal characteristics while negative in-group behaviors are attributed to the necessities of a particular situation (Fisher 2014).

There are many workplace applications of in-group/out-group perceptions as an important source of conflict. For example, in-group social identity attachment might cause Hispanic employees in an American workplace to speak Spanish which leads to prejudicial treatment by Whites who see them as an out-group (Bergman, Watrous-Rodriguez, and Chalkley 2008). As a second example, organizational identity can be a form of social identity, and intergroup rivalries can thus be created by corporate mergers (Terry and Amiot 2008). Because of the exaggerated differences and biases that can emerge from in-group and out-group distinctions,

resolving intergroup conflict can be challenging (Halperin, Gross, and Dweck 2014; Hogg 2013), so recognizing these sources is important.

(Mis)communication

Communication transmits ideas and information between people, and there are many ways in which this can break down and thereby lead to or exacerbate conflict. Krauss and Morsella (2014) outline four paradigms for modeling how ideas and information are transferred.

In the encoding-decoding paradigm, a message is converted to a code (e.g., words), transmitted to someone else (e.g., speaking or writing), and the receiver decodes the message based on their understanding of what they are receiving (e.g., the meaning of the words they hear). But if the communication channel is noisy (e.g., multiple re-tellings) or if the sender and receiver have different meanings for a word (e.g., to “table” a negotiation issue means to put it forward for consideration in British English but instead means to put it aside in American English), then misunderstandings can result, which can lead to conflict.

The intentionalist paradigm focuses on the intended meaning of a message; in this way, understanding a message is not simply a matter of decoding the actual words used, but also requires deciphering the sender’s intent. Inferring this intent is done by the receiver, who filters messages through their own cognitive frame. So if there is a lack of shared understanding, the sender’s intent can be misunderstood.

In the perspective-taking paradigm, the sender of a message should understand the receiver’s perspective and try to phrase the message in a way that will be understood from this perspective. But similar to the intentionalist paradigm, different cognitive frames can make it difficult to understand the other’s perspective, and thus it can be challenging to send a message that will be understood correctly. In short, whether one approaches communication from the

perspective of the sender or the receiver, the human tendency to see the world through one's own frames, lack of understanding of alternative frames, and heightened in-group and out-group differences can lead to miscommunication. When there are multiple audiences for a message, which can be common in labor relations and other work-related settings, these communication challenges can be magnified.

In the first three perspectives, meaning lies in the message, the sender's intent, or the receiver's perspective. A fourth perspective, what Krauss and Morsella (2014) label the dialogic paradigm, identifies meaning through the communication process itself. This approach highlights shared meaning constructed in interactive communication processes, as would be common between co-workers, team members, supervisor-worker relationships, and labor-management negotiators. The dialogic perspective highlights the importance of active listening for creating understanding, which implies that a lack of active listening can be problematic. Interactive communication also has the potential to increase the risks of miscommunication present in the other models if back-and-forth communication magnifies rather than lessens a misunderstanding. Moreover, the interactive dimension of communication allows for the recognition that nonverbal cues and personal demeanor can shape how information is interpreted (Burgoon, Blair, and Strom 2008), which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. Nonverbal communication that is interpreted as aggressive or that contradicts gender-based or other expectations can also cause or influence conflict (Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd 2010).

Numerous cognitive sources of conflict can be observed in the NFL anthem protest case. Identity-based framing of different positions along racial, nationalist, and/or partisan lines exacerbated in- and out-group perceptions and solidly entrenched individuals into various camps (Leonardt 2017). Miscommunications between owners and players occurred because of language

used during meetings, press conferences, and interviews. Conflicting interpretations of the intention behind certain statements, exacerbated by both the mainstream and social media, often served to fuel these misinterpretations and miscommunications (Bonesteel 2017).

Psychogenic Sources of Conflict

The last part of our framework considers psychogenic sources of conflict. Psychogenic conflict arises from or is affected by the psychology of feelings: affective reactions to situations and other people that are triggered by moods or individual personality traits. For example, two personalities might clash or a conflict might occur because someone is having a bad day. Psychogenic conflict should be seen as interacting with the other sources of conflict because conflict may not manifest itself if an individual does not perceive a situation, process, or outcome as threatening enough to his/her well-being or quality of life to elicit an emotional reaction (Pondy 1967). In other words, the contribution of psychogenic factors to a conflict might often be to magnify other types of differences or to escalate conflicts with structural and/or cognitive roots than to necessarily be a sole, independent source of conflict. In any case, the psychogenic dimension is an important potential source of conflict to identify and understand. Resolving other underlying sources of conflict often relies upon first addressing individuals' emotional reactions.

Emotions and Moods

Emotions and moods are psychological experiences of feeling, or what psychologists label affective experiences. Emotions are reactions to specific causes and are therefore short-lived—such as anger, fear, or happiness. Moods, in contrast, are more of a general positive or negative feeling unrelated to a particular cause that is slightly more enduring than an emotion. The literature on conflict recognizes the importance of affective reactions that result from

interpersonal conflict (Spector and Bruk-Lee 2008), but we posit that emotions and moods should also be seen as important causes and influences on conflict. That is, we focus on a causal arrow running from emotions and moods to conflict rather than the reverse.

Emotions can cause conflict through the behaviors they create or by influencing decision-making. Perhaps most intuitively, hard or hostile emotions such as anger, frustration, contempt, and jealousy can lead to aggressive communication behaviors such as criticism, contempt, and yelling while decreasing constructive communication behaviors such as active listening (Guerrero 2013). Humiliation (Lindner 2014) and hatred (Halperin, Gross, and Dweck 2014) are other powerful emotions that can cause (sometimes violent) conflict between individuals and also between groups. Attribution is also likely to be important; for instance, aggression is a normal response to hard emotions like anger when an individual blames someone else for intentionally causing them harm (Raver and Barling 2008). Hot emotions like fear can override self-regulation such that fight or flight reactions are automatic and reflexive (Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross 2014). Fight reactions often lead to observable manifestations of conflict while flight reactions allow conflicts to fester (Patterson et al. 2012). In these ways, emotional reactions might appear involuntary and not mediated by any form of conscious deliberation, leading to conflict; or, emotional reactions might lead to conflict when conscious deliberation causes an emotional reaction. Moreover, negative emotions that create a bad mood can also lead to displaced aggression in which behaviors stemming from, for example, irritability, cause a conflict with someone who was not involved in the initial affective event (Pruitt 2008). Emotional contagion can also cause (or lessen) conflict when a person's negative (positive) mood affect the moods of others (Barsade 2002).

Negative emotions and moods can also cause a conflict to escalate through the behaviors they prompt. For example, when someone finds another's negative behaviors surprising, overwhelming, and disorienting, emotional flooding can make it difficult to process information and instead focus a person's attention on reducing their negative emotions by lashing out (Guerrero 2013). Also, annoyance increases the chance of retaliation while aggression commonly creates more aggression (Pruitt 2008). It is also useful to recognize that groups can develop particularly strong emotions, as when fear or anger spreads through a crowd (Hogg 2013), so the emotional impact on conflict should not be seen in purely interpersonal terms.

In addition to possibly causing or influencing conflict through behavior, emotions and moods can lead to conflict by impacting decision-making. Individuals who are in happy or positive moods have been found to be more confident and optimistic, and make riskier decisions (George and Dane 2016). This can clash with someone who is less confident and wants to make safer decisions. The scope for conflict to arise in this way is magnified by the fact that research has found that incidental emotions “pervasively carry over from one situation to the next, affecting decisions that should, from a normative perspective, be unrelated to that emotion” (Lerner et al. 2015: 803). Discrete emotions—that is, emotions linked directly to the issue being addressed—can influence decision-making in additional ways, including the content and depth of thought, and goal activation (Lerner et al. 2015). Sometimes emotions can improve decision-making, and other times they can have a negative effect. But the main implication for theorizing the roots of conflict is that if decision-making is affected by an individual's emotional state, then two individuals can assess or approach the same situation differently because of different emotional states.

Personality

The second dimension of psychogenic causes or influences on conflict is personality—an individual's typical way of feeling, thinking, and behaving. One way in which personality can affect conflict is as a longer-term mood. That is, one's personality can include an overall tendency to have a positive or a negative affect such that positivity or negativity is not just a mood (state) but a more enduring trait (Barsade and Gibson 2007). So positivity or negativity as a personality trait can influence conflict in a similar way to a good or a bad mood.

Other aspects of one's personality can also cause or contribute to a conflict. A popular way to represent individual differences in personality is the five-factor model consisting of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. While the effect of these traits can be complex and context-dependent, individuals with high values of neuroticism and extraversion and/or low values of agreeableness may be more likely to be contentious, antagonistic, irritable, and even want to dominate others, which can lead to behaviors that cause conflict with others (Bono et al. 2002; Sandy, Boardman, and Deutsch 2014). Similarly, those who score low on openness and conscientiousness tend to be inflexible and disorganized, which can also lead to conflict with others. At the same time, individuals who are conscientious can be more conflict prone if they are excessively fastidious while open individuals can be argumentative and not afraid of conflict (Bono et al. 2002). We assert that the potential importance of personality traits for causing conflict is magnified when we appreciate the prospect of personality differences across individuals. So it's not just that a certain personality type might be more conflict prone, it's also that different personality types might clash to create conflict—such as people who are low on conscientiousness interacting with those who are high

on that same dimension. This is reinforced by research on the relationship between group composition and performance (Mohammed and Angell 2003).

Personality can also affect conflict by affecting an individual's attributions such that different personality types have a tendency to see a conflict as either task- or relationship-based, and the influence of personality on this tendency is stronger when one accounts for the personality of both people involved (Bono et al. 2002). For example, differences in levels of extraversion leads to more conflict that is seen as task-based whereas conscientiousness is associated with relationship-based attributions of the nature of a conflict.

In the NFL anthem protest case, it was common to observe strong emotions, including outrage, often amplified and fueled by social media. The President of the United States, known for his quarrelsome disposition, used Twitter to express his own emotional reaction to the situation, even calling for boycotts of the NFL (Davis 2017). This exacerbated psychogenic conflicts between other actors, including, but not limited to, more directly engaging the broader public in the conflict. The President's response also led to some team owners shifting their initial positions on the original conflict and/or becoming more outspoken about their positions, and generated support for the kneeling NFL players from other athletes and teams (Calfas 2017).

Applications of the Framework

An important test of the usefulness of our framework is whether it enhances our ability to analyze episodes of conflict, accurately diagnose the sources of conflict, and ultimately, tailor interventions and approaches to dispute resolution to address the underlying sources. While we have applied our framework to understand the complex sources of conflict in a recent high-profile case, we further demonstrate its diagnostic value in this section by re-analyzing classic examples from the conflict resolution literature. The examples we draw on are described in three

seminal works: James Kuhn's 1961 book *Bargaining in Grievance Settlement*; William Ury, Jeanne Brett, and Stephen Goldberg's 1989 book *Getting Disputes Resolved: Designing Systems to Cut the Costs of Conflict*; and Karen Jehn's 1997 article "A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Groups." Each of these works develops a framework and/or insights into conflict and dispute resolution. Our intent is not to criticize any of these works, each of which we view as an important cornerstone in the conflict literature and field of dispute resolution; rather our aim is to highlight how our framework adds value by demonstrating its unique contribution vis-à-vis these other works.

We begin with Kuhn's *Bargaining in Grievance Settlement*. At the heart of Kuhn's book investigating grievance processes is the classic example he describes of the "hot tread" grievance (Kuhn 1961: 58-77). On the surface, the hot tread grievance is a story about a grievance filed by workers in a plant making tires for earthmovers who alleged that they had suffered injuries from having to handle overly hot tire treads, leading to burns, and costing them compensation under the plant's piecework pay scheme. The grievance proceeded to arbitration, where the arbitrator denied the union's grievance. Kuhn shows how a much more complex set of interactions, representing the "Real 'Hot Tread' Case," lay underneath this formal grievance and arbitration process. The real hot tread case involved concerns by the workers that they would not be able to make their usual earnings on a mixture of piecework and hourly pay. The union's committeeman who represented them was unable to negotiate a resolution of these concerns with the foreman. Due to a combination of the committeeman's lack of experience and political support and the increasing aggravation of the workers, the conflict intensified and the workers decided to exert their power on the shop floor by filing a series of grievances. After a period of heightened conflict, union and management representatives were able to negotiate a resolution that dealt

with pay concerns and removed some outstanding grievances. Labor relations on the shop floor then returned to a more cooperative pattern.

Kuhn uses the hot tread case to illustrate the process of fractional bargaining, where work groups exert their power on the shop floor to negotiate resolution of conflicts by going around the formal grievance procedure. Applying our framework to this case more clearly reveals the underlying structural, cognitive, and psychogenic elements of the hot tread conflict that need to be recognized to produce an effective resolution.

The structural elements of the hot tread case are the most obvious. The grievance that went to arbitration is a classic example of opposing interests that are resolved through an adversarial adjudicative system. From either an antagonistic or pluralist perspective, there was a structural conflict of interest that produced an antagonistic relationship; management was trying to maintain production while the employees were trying to ensure they received adequate compensation. Yet at the same time, the real hot tread case shows how cognitive framing can be an underlying source of conflict. The reason that the workers were so upset about the problems with the machine was that it interfered with their ability to “make out” their expected earnings—that is, their cognitive frame for understanding the wage-effort bargain included expected daily earnings. When the combination of reduced piecework pay and inadequate supplemental hourly pay meant that they were unable to earn their expected wage, this was perceived as a violation of the normative expectations embedded within their cognitive frame, thereby producing the true conflict of the real hot tread case.

In addition to its structural and cognitive elements, the hot tread case also illustrates the psychogenic sources of conflict. Although hot treads were a frequent enough occurrence that the plant provided workers with asbestos pads to protect their hands while handling the tires, in this

particular case they had been treated at the hospital, producing a shift in emotions and moods.

Here is how one of their own union leaders viewed the situation:

After talking to the committeeman and crew, he was not convinced that the men had received any serious burns, though they undoubtedly had been inconvenienced. Explaining his stand later, he said that if the men had not been in bad shape when they left for the hospital, “they sure were convinced of it when they came back. The nurse was pretty dumb and had put Ungentine on and bandaged their hands in yards of gauze. *They were pretty worked up after that*” (Kuhn 1961: 63, emphasis added).

An important element in the hot tread case is the layering of physical injury and emotional reaction to it, which produced an intensified psychogenic conflict apart from the structural issues of what the rule was for compensation when there were problems with the machinery or conflicts arising from clashing cognitive frames about what was necessary to “make out” their day’s earnings. To fully resolve the conflicts in this case requires understanding all of these layers.

Our second case example is taken from Ury, Brett, and Goldberg’s *Getting Disputes Resolved*, which presents their framing of rights, power, and interests as three approaches to resolving disputes. They illustrate this framework with the classic case of a dispute involving a miner’s stolen boots (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg 1989: 3-10). The miners, who owned their own safety boots, left their work clothes and boots at the mine between shifts. One night a miner arrived to discover his boots were gone and complained to the shift boss that they had been stolen, meaning that he was unable to work without safety boots and would lose a shift’s pay. Ury, Brett, and Goldberg describe the shift boss’s initial denial of the company’s responsibility to replace the lost boots as an example of a rights-based attempt to resolve the dispute based on the rules. The miner responded to this denial of his complaint by organizing a wildcat strike among his fellow miners. Ury, Brett, and Goldberg describe this as a power-based method of trying to resolve the dispute. Finally, the superintendent of the mine stepped in and proposed

replacing the stolen boots so the miners could get back to work, the miner who lost his boots would earn his shift pay, and the mine would not suffer the costs of lost production. The authors describe this last approach as an interest-based method of resolving the dispute.

The framing of interests, rights, and power, is a very valuable way of thinking about different approaches or processes for resolving disputes. But it is less successful in revealing the underlying sources or nature of the conflict processes that drive disputes; thus, applying one of these approaches may not actually resolve the underlying sources of the conflict. At the outset, the mining dispute arose from a conflict in cognitive frames: the miner's idea of fairness meant he believed that he should not lose a shift's pay due to someone stealing his boots versus the shift boss's idea that boots were personal property and not the company's responsibility. Layered on top of this conflict between cognitive frames over what was considered "fair" in this situation, however, were psychogenic elements of the emotions expressed in this interaction. Consider how Ury, Brett, and Goldberg describe the way in which each party communicate their respective positions:

"Hard luck!" the shift boss responded. "The company isn't responsible for personal property left on company premises. *Read the mine regulations!*"
The miner *grumbled* to himself, *"I'll show them! If I can't work this shift, neither will anyone else!"* (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg 1989: 3, emphasis added).

These comments show invective language, exclamations, and passionate responses to having a request denied. As the mood escalates from a discussion of a problem to a clash of personalities in the workplace, we see the conflict becoming increasingly psychogenic in nature, leading to the expression of the wildcat strike.

Finally, we see the superintendent returning to the structural conflicts underlying this dispute. Why do the different cognitive frames and psychogenic conflicts matter so much here? The reason is that there was also a structural conflict between the mine management's interest in

maintaining its authority and ensuring production at the mine and the workers' interests in maintaining their earnings from working their shifts. While there is an antagonistic element to this relationship, it is resolved in pluralistic fashion as the superintendent recognizes the mutual interest involved in getting work resumed so that production can be maintained and the workers continue to earn their pay. But this structural resolution is quite possibly a temporary solution because the cognitive and psychogenic aspects have not been addressed and thus may keep festering until another flashpoint again brings them to the surface.

Our third illustration is drawn from Karen Jehn's seminal article on intragroup conflict, "A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups" (Jehn 1997). Jehn uses qualitative evidence from a study of six work groups at a household-goods moving company to develop a model of the nature and effect of intragroup conflict. At the core of Jehn's model is the typology of three different types of conflict: task conflict, involving disagreements over "the content and goals of the work"; relationship conflict, involving "interpersonal relationships"; and process conflict, involving "how tasks would be accomplished" (Jehn 1997: 551). In this model, the impact of these three types of conflict on group performance is moderated by other characteristics of the conflict: resolution potential, acceptability norms, emotionality, and importance.

Our own analysis of three sources of conflict—structural, cognitive, and psychogenic—should not be seen as an alternative schema to Jehn's three types of conflict, which is a categorization focusing on the locus of conflict. Rather, our framework represents an analysis of the underlying sources of conflict that can produce different manifestations in the three types of conflict that Jehn identifies. We illustrate this point by examining some of the examples of

conflicts that Jehn uses to illustrate her model. For example, she illustrates task conflict with the following interview comments and field notes:

“Sometimes people get *irritated* at each other about work matters...”

“We usually fight about work things – *interpreting our reports*, disagreeing about government regulations.”

“The *pace is so fast*. They don’t have time to deliberate so that it’s a constant give and take. It’s very busy and they are all doing ten things at once yet the need to reach agreement on the border decision” (Jehn 1997: 542, emphasis added).

These are three good examples of situations where the locus of conflict is the task. But they each have a different source. The first illustrates psychogenic conflict where a mood or emotion (i.e., irritability) was driving the conflict. The second is an example of cognitive conflict where the individuals had different interpretative schema over how to interpret the reports and government regulations. The third shows structural sources of conflict where the pace of work and the tension between organizational demands and individual work capacity produces conflict.

Jehn describes a relationship conflict between an informant and a co-worker that included comments “Her attitude just stinks” and “I just can’t stand her attitude and her voice” (Jehn 1997: 542), suggesting a conflict rooted in psychogenic reactions of emotion and mood, or personality differences, whereas other relationship conflict might be rooted in cognitive elements such as cultural differences or miscommunication. Similarly, the following description of a process conflict suggests structural roots to conflict based on organizational incentives: “The group was discussing which operations would include Pat...‘I’m not sure if it’s his responsibility to be included in this. He doesn’t count on our budget.’” (Jehn 1997: 542). And yet other process conflicts are rooted in different cognitive perceptions of the most efficient way to get things done: “Jeff suggested that he finish the mail so Joan could go on break but Mary told him that he wouldn’t be fast enough. They were having a big problem figuring out how to utilize their people and schedule breaks efficiently” (Jehn 1997: 542).

Note that these examples illustrate how Jehn's different types of conflict may not only arise from different sources within each type of conflict (e.g., task conflict could be caused by structural, cognitive, and/or psychogenic factors), but also that different types of conflict can result from the same sources (e.g., cognitive factors could cause a task, relationship, or process conflict). This is an important difference between our framework and Jehn's because even though unit members in Jehn's study perceived causes of "process conflict as uniquely and identifiably different from task conflict" (1997: 541), our framework identifies the possibility that disputants are unaware that different types of conflict may be originating from the same source. Thus, by focusing on resolving the underlying source(s) of the conflicts, unit members may be able to more effectively resolve multiple types of conflict at the same time.

Our point in re-analyzing these examples is to illustrate the need for understanding the underlying structural, cognitive, and psychogenic sources of conflict. We propose that only by incorporating an analysis of the sources of conflict into understanding workplace disputes, can we begin to develop better approaches to resolving them, which we highlight next.

Managing Conflict at its Sources

Disputes can be resolved in various ways (Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus 2014; Lipsky, Avgar, and Lamare 2016; Roche, Teague, and Colvin 2014; Ury et al. 1989). But there is a need to better integrate a comprehensive framework on the causes of conflict with different approaches to dispute resolution—that is, to manage conflict at its sources. Conceptually, it is important for the conflict literature to identify the dimensions of conflict that different dispute resolution methods are more or less better equipped to address to set a foundation for future empirical work analyzing these links. And practically this is important for helping dispute resolution professionals identify appropriate and effective interventions and methods for

resolving conflict. In this section, we identify ways in which workplace dispute resolution could be more closely tied to an understanding of the root causes of a conflict. Given the often-complex interactions among different conflict sources, it is beyond the scope of our current paper to fully develop all the implications of our framework for effective dispute resolution. However, we make a preliminary effort toward highlighting some of the ways in which our framework helps to think through the most effective interventions or dispute resolution approaches for each of our three sources, and note that there is scope for much additional work.

Resolving Structural Conflict

Resolving structural conflicts requires diagnosing whether a particular conflict is best characterized by the egoist, unitarist, pluralist, or antagonistic mindsets. If the structure of a relationship is characterized by unitarism, then the structure likely is not the problem. Rather, conflict may stem from failing to recognize the mutual nature of the relationship which implies that the frames of the participants need to change, and/or that the particular policies and practices need revising to reflect the unitarist nature of the relationship. In contrast, if the structure of a relationship is better characterized by an egoist structure, then resolving a conflict may require determining whether there are realistic alternatives to the proposed exchange, and ensuring each side fulfills its side of the bargain. In a pluralist relationship, more attention needs to be paid to the relationship and hence the other's interests because there are fewer alternatives so the parties need to live with the consequences to a greater extent than in an egoist relationship. Failing to recognize these differences will make it more difficult to effectively address conflict rooted in different structural contexts.

Recognizing alternative structural forms of conflict is also important for appropriately factoring in issues of power. In an egoist relationship, power is less important than self-interest.

If someone gives you a good deal, take it; if not, take your next best alternative. In a unitarist relationship, a focus on power likely interferes with finding interest-aligning policies. In contrast, power differences are likely a significant aspect of an antagonistic relationship, and distributive negotiations would be fully consistent in this structure. Integrative bargaining is very difficult in an antagonistic structure. In a pluralist relationship, both distributive and integrative negotiations are likely, and the parties or third party dispute resolution actors would likely need to ensure that power is not exercised in an overly aggressive way that undermines the shared interests and enduring nature of the relationship.

The appropriate roles of rules and third party interventions for resolving conflict will also vary with the nature of the relationship. In an egoist relationship, the existence of rules governing exchanges should serve to prevent conflict by allowing efficient exchanges to occur. Third party intervention would only be necessary to resolve conflict to the degree that enforcement of these rules is necessary, including adherence to agreed-upon terms, suggesting arbitration-type procedures that allow adjudication of rule violations. In an unitarist relationship, the mutuality of the situation suggests that rules are not necessary to police behaviors, nor is arbitration of conflicts desirable. Rather mediation-type third party interventions are most useful in helping the parties to recognize their mutual interests and resolve any coordination problems or barriers to achieving the integrative potential inherent in their relationship. However, if the relationship is antagonistic in structure, efforts to mediate in search of common interests risk obscuring the fundamental oppositions of interest that drive conflict in the relationship. Rules and arbitration-type third party interventions may be useful, but only to the extent that they are directed at addressing the antagonistic structure of the relationship and correcting the power imbalances that are inherent in it. By contrast, pluralist relationships are most open to a range of dispute

resolution responses, including both establishing governing rules by the parties themselves and mediation- and arbitration-type third party interventions, reflecting the diverse nature of distribution and integrative issues inherent in this type of relationship.

Failing to accurately diagnose the structural nature of a conflict can make efforts to resolve the conflict ineffective. Prior to the 2018 season, the NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell issued a policy directive that stated teams would be fined if players kneel during the anthem (Lockhart 2018). In issuing this top-down directive, the league arguably misdiagnosed or ignored the pluralist structure of the relationship between the players and the owners. This means that certain players' interests are being ignored and the structural imbalance of power between the African-American players and the owners is being overlooked. Predictably, then, the conflict was not resolved by this directive—indeed, it was challenged by the players' union and, as of early August 2018, there is no resolution.

Resolving Cognitive Conflict

Diagnosing different factors that cause or influence conflict that relate to cognitive functioning, including interpretation, perception, information processing, decision-making, and communication, is also important for applying effective approaches to dispute resolution. When a conflict is rooted in differing cognitive frames, then there are various techniques to address these differences. Frame alignment processes include frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation (Snow et al. 1986). An alternative way to approach this is via a sequence of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing cognitive frames (Barr, Stimpert, and Huff 1992). If one party to a dispute recognizes that a conflict is rooted in conflicting frames, that party can try to align the frames (Cornelissen and Werner 2014), and this can also be an important mediator task (Bodtker and Jameson 1997).

One aspect of frame adjustment to resolve a dispute is reframing the structural nature of a conflict (Mayer 2012). For instance, integrative bargaining can be very difficult if the parties believe that the nature of their relationship is defined by an antagonistic structure. Reorienting this mindset by changing the parties' cognitive frame about the structural nature of the relationship is likely needed if integrative bargaining is to be successful. But to recognize the fundamental importance of cognitive frames is to appreciate that cognitive frames are not simply lenses for viewing the structural nature of a particular conflict; rather, they are potentially a cause of conflict by shaping how participants interpret information and communication. So exaggerated differences between in-group and out-group members can be occurring because of a cognitive frame. Interventions can be constructed to change this cognitive frame and thereby open up possibilities for conflict resolution (Halperin, Gross, and Dweck 2014). More generally, interactional frame theories assert that a key aspect of any conflict is the process of the parties co-creating not only the meaning of the issues, but the meaning of their relationship, and alignment needs to occur to resolve a dispute (Dewulf et al. 2009).

Turning to conflict that has an aspect of limited information processing, people can more easily identify cognitive errors made by others than themselves (Pronin 2007). Providing individuals training in decision-making biases and teaching them critical thinking and self-awareness can help them become aware of decision-making blind spots to work through this type of cognitive conflict. A complementary approach is to consider and shape the participants' motives for information processing—especially enhancing an accuracy motivation, lessening a defense motivation, and managing an impression motivation (Ledgerwood, Callahan, and Chaiken 2014). Rules and choice architecture can also be used to guide individuals around

undesirable heuristics and cognitive biases. Communication strategies for overcoming misinformation have also been developed (Lewandowsky et al. 2012).

Recognizing when miscommunication causes or contributes to a conflict also points to specific conflict resolution strategies. For example, the four paradigms of communication outlined earlier yield a number of principles, including avoiding communication channels with low signal-to-noise ratios, listening for the intended meanings of what's being said, communicating in ways that the listener will understand your intent and that reflects the listener's perspective, and establishing conditions in which an effective dialogue can occur (Krauss and Morsella 2014). Strategies to address communication challenges in cross-cultural interactions are particularly important yet challenging (van Meurs and Spencer-Oatey 2007).

Lastly, the strengths and weakness of both negotiation and different forms of third party assistance relate to solving cognitive conflict. Negotiation may more easily resolve access to information, whereas neutral outside third parties such as mediators may be required to help resolve conflict due to different frames of reference held by the parties or difficulties in communicating (Zariski 2010). Use of rules that structure interactions and arbitration-type third party interventions that impose a solution on the parties may provide ways of resolving an immediate dispute, however these approaches may be less effective in preventing recurrence of conflict if the roots of that conflict are cognitive, since they do not directly address the key sources.

Resolving Psychogenic Conflict

Psychogenic conflict is perhaps the most difficult type of conflict to tackle. This aspect of conflict is not easily resolved through negotiation, nor is it likely to be truly resolved by the imposition of a solution by a third party such as a manager or an arbitrator. Rules and choice

architecture may prevent stressful situations from resulting in emotional flare-ups (Lerner et al. 2015). But the most accessible strategy is to give people tools to work through their own emotions, or to control their moods in different situations, either in advance of a conflict or during it. When dealing with hot emotions, cooling strategies such as taking a time-out or a break and trying to re-orient an individual's attention to be more reflective and self-distanced rather than self-immersed can facilitate problem solving (Mischel, DeSmet, and Kross 2014; Lerner et al. 2015).

If anger (Pruitt 2008) or humiliation (Lindner 2014) are contributing to a conflict, then the other party can potentially lessen these emotions by acknowledging them. More generally, cycles of negativity can be broken by positive behavior by others, especially when the extent of the positive behavior exceeds expectations (Guerrero 2013). It is also useful to recognize that some emotions can be helpful in trying to resolve a conflict to the extent that individuals want to feel a sense of belonging and recognition (Lindner 2014). With respect to personality, an understanding of how different personality types approach not only conflict, but feeling, thinking, and behavior more generally can be useful to understand how to best engage with others constructively and productively. Mediators and other facilitators who recognize the psychogenic aspects of conflict can be prepared to intervene in productive ways, but this is unlikely to happen if the psychogenic elements of a conflict are unrecognized.

Transformative mediation is an approach to third party intervention that more directly focuses on psychogenic conflict (Bush and Folger 1994). In transformative mediation, the mediator seeks to improve the relationship between the parties and empower the parties so that they will be able to resolve future conflicts themselves. Part of the premise of transformative mediation is that there are psychogenic aspects to conflict that are particular to individuals and/or

that can become embedded in relationships between individuals; it is futile to hope to achieve long-term resolution of the conflict until these negative psychogenic aspects are addressed. For instance, there is a substantial amount of literature focused on strategies and methods for how to self-regulate one's own emotional responses to conflict (e.g., Patterson et al. 2012), how to resolve emotionally-charged conflicts (e.g., Shapiro 2017), and even how to use emotions strategically during negotiations (Fisher and Shapiro 2005). Even if not adopting a specific transformative mediation approach, it is important that dispute resolution professionals work to develop some of these skills in addressing psychogenic conflict. They can often apply across different dispute resolution processes and even help improve the resolution of structural and cognitive sources of conflict by avoiding their conflation with psychogenic factors that inevitably arise during dispute resolution processes.

The Need for Multipronged Approaches for Multilayered Disputes

To effectively manage conflict at its sources is to recognize that dispute resolution needs to be tailored to the specifics of each conflict based on a careful diagnosis of the possible overlapping structural, cognitive, and psychogenic dimensions. A recent example of the importance of this is the response of Google executives to a leaked internal memo written by an employee, James Damore, that criticized Google's diversity practices—particularly the company's attempts to recruit and retain women. The conflict contained elements of all three of our sources of conflict. Google fired Damore, an action indicative of Google seeing this as antagonistic structural conflict with incompatible interests between it and Damore. Damore's firing caused an outpouring of reactions inside and outside of Google, with key debates focusing on employee free speech and on the broader challenges for women within the highly masculine Silicon Valley culture. However, the conflict eventually faded from public discussion,

particularly after Damore’s complaint filed with the NLRB against Google was not upheld. Thus, on the surface it appeared to have been an effective resolution.

More recent events, however, highlight that employees within Google are on different sides of the debated issues, and the memo conflict was symptomatic of much deeper cognitive sources of conflict within the company—specifically, different cognitive frames and preferences, in-group and out-group perceptions, and (mis)communication. For instance, not even a year after Damore was fired, Tim Chevalier, a disabled transgender employee, filed a lawsuit alleging that Google fired him over his creation of internal memes that defended women of color and other marginalized people, and stated that he would not work with people who shared Damore’s views. HR received a complaint against Chevalier about his posts, and his manager told him he was engaging in too much “social activism” (Conger 2018). The strong emotional reactions to the Damore and Chevalier cases both within and outside Google, including the expressions of outrage and disgust, also imply a psychogenic element to these conflicts. All of this suggests that the underlying source of the conflict within Google that led to Damore’s memo was not effectively resolved by the structural solution of firing him.

The Google case illustrates that misdiagnosing the initial source(s) of a conflict and applying an inappropriate dispute resolution approach may be ineffective at resolving the dispute, or worse, compound its complexity by introducing new conflicts and/or new sources (e.g., psychogenic reactions to the dispute resolution tactic). Moreover, it highlights that there is not necessarily one best way to resolve a dispute, especially a complex one, and there may be multiple aspects of a conflict which require multipronged dispute resolution strategies.

In contrast to the dispute resolution failings of the Google case, Kuhn’s (1961) “hot tread” case provides an example where managers and union officials were ultimately able to

successfully negotiate resolutions to multiple (and sometimes unrelated) issues that were being driven by multilayered sources of conflict. While Kuhn's own analysis (1961: 73) focused on how union officials and workers initially exerted their power both within and outside the grievance process, and how different contextual factors (e.g., the significant number of workers involved in the grievance) limited the ability to adopt more "peaceful" approaches to dispute resolution, the structural nature of this analysis did not identify the cognitive and psychogenic sources of conflict that were key reasons for why the workers chose to adopt more disruptive tactics. The workers in this case felt as though they had been mistreated, exhibiting psychogenic reactions including anger and hurt feelings, and workers who had not been injured began to convince themselves that their health and safety was at risk (Kuhn 1961: 62-63), suffering from a classic case of the cognitive bias known as groupthink. As a result, a negotiation-based approach to resolving the hot tread dispute based solely on a structural understanding of interests and sources of power did not address the full set of sources of this dispute, and likely exacerbated it.

One of the major reasons the line manager and union official were ultimately able to resolve the conflict was because both finally recognized its cognitive and psychogenic sources:

"The trouble was largely a shop problem, local and personal, and not a conflict between union and management. The settlement depended first of all upon the *personal accommodation* that Howard and Buchanan gradually reached and later upon an *understanding* between the tuber crew and the tuber foremen, but in any case not directly upon any larger solution." (Kuhn 1961: 76, emphasis added).

Perhaps ironically, the case would not be fully resolved until it had been taken to arbitration. While arbitration is more often associated with resolving antagonistic structural sources of conflict, the workers' perceptions that they had been initially mistreated would not allow them to back down based on principle, even though they had a weak case. Howard, the union official, might have "dropped it entirely except that Nicols and some of his friends kept after him about

it” (Kuhn 1961: 70). Interestingly, the witness who received the worst burns and was most critical for winning the arbitration case (Nicols) did not show up for the arbitration hearing, and Howard (the union official) was convinced that “Nicols wanted him to lose the case” (Kuhn 1961: 70), likely to take revenge on Howard for his unwillingness to press a grievance that Nicols had previously brought to him about another matter. Although the union lost the grievance at arbitration, the delay of seven months in getting to arbitration that it introduced into the dispute resolution process produced a cooling-off effect allowing the strong psychogenic reactions and cognitive groupthink that had been key sources of conflict to subside. With the multilayered structural, cognitive, and psychogenic sources of conflict all addressed, workplace labor relations on the tread-tuber line returned to a more positive, cooperative pattern.

Both the Google and hot tread examples illustrate that conflicts can be dynamic, rather than static, with the potential for the source of the conflict to change in the midst of attempts to resolve the initial source(s) of the dispute. This reinforces the need for those trying to resolve disputes to understand the range of possible sources of conflict, so that changes in the nature or sources of a particular dispute can be identified and appropriately addressed, rather than inadvertently contributing to compounding the conflict. Also, by becoming more aware of the range of possible sources and being primed to look for them, dispute resolution professionals can be better prepared to recognize that disputants may have different perceptions on the sources of a dispute. The potential for disputes to have dynamic and/or perceptual elements also imply that organizational dispute resolution systems need to be flexible in order to allow the dispute resolution method to match the changing nature and/or differing perceptions of the conflict sources.

Moreover, the potential for conflict to occur within groups should not be underestimated (e.g., different factions of workers within Google), and should usually be resolved prior to attempts to address conflicts between groups. Our framework can easily be applied to understand the sources of conflict that occur within groups as well as between groups, and further illustrates the need for dispute resolution professionals to develop multi-pronged and/or multi-method approaches to understanding the sources of conflict and its resolution.

Conclusion

Conflict is an enduring feature of all social life. In the workplace, conflict often manifests in disputes between co-workers, collective agreement negotiations between managers and employees over wages and workloads, or any one of an infinite number of interactions that may occur between various organizational stakeholders (and may even include those beyond the organization). A tremendous amount of thought and research has been put into understanding conflict across a wide variety of academic disciplines, including but not limited to industrial and employment relations, management, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, communications, and law. This has generated frameworks and theories that have been applied to dispute resolution approaches in a number of practical settings. While it is not possible to be completely comprehensive, we attempt to incorporate key insights from many of these literatures into our framework.

Our paper both synthesizes and integrates diverse views on conflict to create a unique multidisciplinary framework for understanding major sources of conflict—distilled down to three multi-dimensional categories—structural, cognitive, and psychogenic. Disputes can be multi-faceted with numerous causes that interact in complex ways. We assert that it is important to conceptually distinguish different aspects of the full range of sources of conflict to appreciate the

nature of each particular dispute, because what can be considered “effective” dispute resolution must be rooted in a comprehensive and accurate understanding of its origins.

Our approach is not intended to imply that structural, cognitive, and psychogenic sources are independent or can be isolated in practice. But by identifying and synthesizing the separate pieces of a potentially complex puzzle into an integrative framework, researchers and practitioners are better equipped to understand, analyze, diagnose, and propose solutions to these complex puzzles. Moreover, explicit consideration of the full range of potential causes of a dispute should help practitioners appreciate whether an intervention is likely to have only temporarily resolved the manifestations of a conflict, rather than the underlying sources. In the NFL case, if a team owner issues a directive for players to not kneel during the anthem, this may appear to resolve the dispute if the players obey, but does not resolve the root causes of why the conflict over the interests of the owner and the interests of the players arose in the first place. Moreover, disciplining player(s) may only result in a short-term resolution if the frames, information issues, group identities, and personality clashes that underlie this issue remain unaddressed, and worse, may only serve to exacerbate the conflict. In the case of the miner’s stolen boots, Ury et al. (1989: 6) acknowledged that the initial dispute was not simply about interests, but also that emotion was to blame: “emotions often generate disputes, and disputes, in turn, often generate emotions. Frustration underlay the miner’s initial outburst to the shift boss; anger at the shift boss’s response spurred him to provoke the strike.” Thus, even though the miner’s boots were eventually replaced, this outcome may not resolve the underlying issues that caused the conflict in the first place, increasing the likelihood of recurrence.

We acknowledge that the individual conflict sources we highlight in our framework are recognized in different parts of the conflict and dispute resolution literatures. However, the

existing literature has predominantly looked at these sources in isolation. What we are ultimately calling for is more explicit attention to be devoted to the multiple, varied sources of conflict. We provide a contribution toward this end that adopts a breadth equal to the real-life complexity of many workplace disputes, rather than privileging particular aspects.

Our comprehensive multidisciplinary framework generates a new approach for identifying the root sources of workplace conflict that transcends disciplinary silos. Appropriate and effective dispute resolution methods should be based on a relatively comprehensive understanding of the robust range of conflict sources. Organizational dispute resolution systems, processes, and interventions need to be both tailored and at the same time flexible enough to encompass diverse types of disputes. We illustrate the unique contribution of our framework by re-analyzing classic case examples in the dispute resolution literature. Our framework highlights additional considerations for understanding the sources of conflict in these cases, and the potential for more effective resolution of conflict that may result from more comprehensive and accurate diagnosing of its underlying sources.

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Table 1
A Multi-Dimensional Framework on the Sources of Conflict

Category	Definition and Dimensions
Structural	<p>The nature of the relationship between the interests or goals of two or more people or organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-interested exchange with accessible alternatives (egoist) • Lasting interdependence with mutual gains structure (unitarist) • Lasting interdependence with mixed-motive structure (pluralist) • Lasting interdependence with win-lose structure (antagonistic)
Cognitive	<p>Individual or group mental maps, assessments, or framing of a situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive frames and preferences • (Limited) information processing • (In- and Out-) group perceptions • (Mis)communication
Psychogenic	<p>Individual affective reactions to situations and other people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions and moods • Personality