



Workplace Conflict Consultation Program

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Workplace Conflict Consultation Program

1. Please provide a brief description of this program.

The Workplace Conflict Consultation Program offered by the Office of Employment Dispute Resolution (EDR) at the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management offers an alternative, informal, and confidential resource for Virginia executive branch human resource management to seek assistance with the most common types of workplace conflicts presented within their own agencies such as communication, trust, respect, and management/work style difficulties. This multi-component program includes four proactive approaches for agency human resource management to resolve workplace disputes at the earliest possible level that include conflict coaching, conflict management skill building trainings, one-on-one phone consultations, and a statewide workplace mediation program.

One of the primary purposes of the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program is to provide additional support to state agency human resource professionals by offering supplementary conflict management training and tools that will effectively address their existing and potential future workplace conflicts. The Workplace Conflict Consultation Program's innovative approach of coupling a statewide mediation program with three additional proactive, early intervention services ultimately prevents and alleviates conflict to allow agency human resource managers to focus more time and effort on service delivery for the Commonwealth and its citizens. Since the program's inception in 2014, nearly 900 state employees have participated in at least one of the four early-intervention Workplace Conflict Consultation Program services.

The central innovative component to EDR's Workplace Conflict Consultation Program is providing **conflict coaching** as a cost-effective resource to state agencies. EDR's conflict coaching is designed to help an employee better understand the way s/he typically responds to workplace conflict. EDR's conflict coach utilizes either the individual or 360 Conflict Dynamic Profile®ⁱ assessment tool to identify the employee's most problematic areas. The conflict coach then helps the employee create an action plan that

outlines goals and sets target dates over the course of four coaching sessions with the employee.

Another component of the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program is the one-hour **confidential phone consultation service** in which an agency human resource manager may refer an employee and can then be utilized by the Commonwealth's workforce for in-depth, interpersonal, organizational, evaluative, and/or peer relationship conflicts in the workplace. Intended for more complex issues of workplace conflict, EDR will listen carefully to the concerns presented, assist in analyzing the cause of conflict, and develop strategies and resources for addressing and responding to the issues.

EDR will also mediate an agency's workplace conflict through its statewide **mediation** program. This service is a voluntary, confidential process through which EDR mediators assist state employees with expressing their thoughts and feelings associated with workplace disputes in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. The program is designed to enable employees to explore their differences and develop their own resolution to the workplace concerns. EDR's mediation service is available to all state employees free of charge. EDR currently has 48 workplace mediators from the public and private sector who voluntarily commit their time to conduct EDR mediations each year.

Finally, EDR offers a variety of **conflict management skill building courses**, which agency human resource professionals may request to be conducted within their own agency in order to provide the skills to properly and more effectively address and manage conflict. Currently these classes include, but are not limited to, *Conflict Management 101*, *Handling Workplace Conflict Effectively*, and *Constructive Communication Skills*. EDR can reach far more state employees through proactive training, providing human resource managers, supervisors, and employees with skills necessary for effective conflict resolution. An agency human resource office may request EDR to come to their location to conduct a specific training onsite, or in the alternative, open registration courses are also periodically available.

Additional information about the program can be found on EDR's website at: <http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/edr> or at [this link](#), as well as on the attached handout.

2. How long has this program been operational?

The Virginia Department of Human Resource Management implemented the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program in April 2014 as a step in adopting a statewide approach to integrated conflict management, providing state agency human resource offices with specialized services only available in the private sector at higher costs.

3. Why was this program created?

The Workplace Conflict Consultation Program was created because workplace disputes are unavoidable and unresolved conflict is costly and destabilizing. Unresolved conflict leads to wasted time, reduced decision quality, increased turnover of skilled employees, absenteeism, and grievances, while important services to the Commonwealth's citizens fail or become inefficient. Studies have shown that managers spend 20-40% of their time dealing with employee conflicts rather than focusing efforts on increasing productivity. In addition, conflict resolution experts estimate that 65% of work performance problems result from unmanaged employee conflict rather than a lack of skill or motivation. Anyone who has experienced uncontrolled conflict in the workplace knows the dramatic impact it can have on the individuals involved, employees around them, and constraints on work production.

EDR's assists state agency human resource offices in ameliorating the effects of conflict through broad, proactive early intervention methods like those adopted by the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program. However, with budgets tight and resources stretched, human resource offices often rely on traditional reactive complaint mechanisms available for employee concerns. This program has been structured in such a way to remove financial impediments to proactive conflict management services for state agency human resource offices. Indeed, if procured from private sector vendors, agencies would be faced with conflict coaching costs at roughly three times what EDR's program requires for a similar coaching service, while private sector mediations can cost upwards of \$1600

for a single co-mediated session. The Workplace Conflict Consultation Program was created to provide state agency human resource offices with the ability to provide cost-effective, proactive conflict management resources that would otherwise be unattainable for many due to expense.

4. What are the costs of this program?

EDR structured the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program so that costs are primarily borne by the central Human Resources agency in Virginia. Program services are provided by a single Senior Consultant, who conducts the conflict coaching sessions, the phone consultations, and mediates some of the workplace disputes. In order to meet the agency mediation demand, EDR relies upon the use of 48 volunteer mediators, some of whom are interagency state employees and others who are mediators in the private sector, to offer their time to mediate state agency workplace disputes. Furthermore, EDR cross-trains its current staff of consultants to occasionally act as trainers or co-trainers for EDR's conflict management skill-building classes. As such, costs are minimal and generally consist of the amount necessary to fund the Senior Consultant reassigned to be the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program Director.

The only costs charged for Workplace Conflict Consultation Program services are the assessment fees for the Conflict Dynamics Profile® tool. Currently, individual assessments (primarily utilized in conflict management skill-building trainings) are \$35 per employee, while the 360 evaluation assessment (utilized in conflict coaching) is approximately \$230 per employee. Minimal travel costs (mileage) are sometimes charged for mediators and trainers, as well.

5. How is the program funded?

Because of the need for proactive services to address workplace conflict, EDR reprioritized a portion of its existing general fund operational budget to support the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program.

6. How do you measure the success of this program?

Success of the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program is measured primarily through participant feedback, but also through cost avoidance and increased agency demand for this program.

EDR's conflict coaching program has met with a great deal of success, logging 71 coaching sessions in its relatively short lifetime and a projected 51% increase in our conflict coaching service demand this year. Overall, conflict coaching participants have expressed positive feedback about this new proactive service as well. Upon completion of their conflict coaching sessions, 100% of participants completing a feedback questionnaire strongly agreed (the highest rating possible) that they were satisfied with the overall performance of the Workplace Conflict Coach since the program's inception.

Another primary benefit to agency human resource offices of conflict coaching is cost avoidance: freeing managers and employees from the burdens of ineffectual conflict resolution to allow workplaces to flourish productively. By way of example, one coaching client, a manager, assisted recently by EDR was embroiled in constant conflict for over a year. Since completing the program, the manager reported huge improvements in the way his office has functioned. Using the midpoint of an estimated 30% of a manager's time being spent on employee conflicts, EDR's coaching program has helped this agency avoid costs of over \$17,000 in wasted work time for this manager alone. This figure does not even take into account the beneficial impacts on other employees in the work unit as well.

Since the program's inception, 100% of participants submitting feedback questionnaires about the consultation service rated their overall experience as good or better and EDR anticipates a 120% increase in demand for this service this year. When participants were asked what they liked most about the consultation service, one participant stated "I am extremely thankful for the solid advice, the kindness, and the feeling of satisfaction knowing I am working toward resolution of my workplace problems." Another participant commented, "For the first time in a long time, at least 8 months, I was heard by someone else who could offer suggestions to resolve issues." A third participant noted "a very calming energy was conveyed over the phone. I felt heard and I felt the advice was sound and could actually solve my issues."

This past fiscal year 98% of mediation participants were satisfied with the service and 79% of mediations resulted in either a verbal or written agreement. Since July 2012, DHRM has continued to see an increased demand for workplace mediations with a 31% increase in fiscal year 2014 and 34% increase in fiscal year 2015.

Finally, 99% of training participants submitting feedback questionnaires about the conflict management trainings they attended rated their overall training as good or better. In fiscal year 2015, 252 state employees participated in one of EDR's conflict management trainings and EDR estimates a 38% increase in training participation this fiscal year.

7. How has the program changed since its inception?

The only aspect of the Workplace Conflict Consultation Program that has changed since its inception is a significant increase in demand from state agencies for all four proactive, early intervention services.

ⁱ The Conflict Dynamics Profile® is a registered trademark of Eckerd College.