

UK Competitiveness slipping: Rising levels of workplace conflict to blame

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The UK's inability to deal with conflict at work is reducing our efficiency. On average 370 million working days a year are lost as a result of conflict (CIPD, 2008). Unless UK Plc. opens its eyes to the impact workplace conflicts are having on our economy the situation can only worsen.

The value of employees is tied up in their emotional resilience and ability to deal with conflict at work – to get on with clients and colleagues and get on with the job. And we're not doing well in comparison with the emerging Economies.

According to global research by OPP in 2008, Brazil not only trains more employees in conflict management than any other country but also "tops the league for positive outcomes from conflict; 84% versus 76% overall" (OPP 2008). Soon, it won't just be the quality of life attracting British business brains abroad. If we do not act to deal with our conflict inefficiencies the UK could face the same fate as our manufacturing industry in the 1970s, as our reliance on the service sector means interpersonal skills are more essential than ever. Fall behind in how we get along with others, and we will once again get overlooked as companies set up businesses where people can be better relied on to sort out differences directly, and not take their employer to court.

So to stay competitive the UK service sector must accept the business imperative for becoming more conflict competent.

The Global Competitiveness Report, published by the World Economic Forum (WEE 2012) has highlighted the UK's fall from 7th-12th place in only a year. By making "conflict competence" a workplace must-have, our service sector will gain a new competitive advantage, and work more efficiently with the resources at hand.

"Conflict Competence" means valuing how relationships are sustained from top to bottom, and from policy to practice. Policies alone won't succeed. Mediation is a case in point.

Managing Director of CMP Resolutions Katherine Graham said:

"Even though mediation can be found in most policies, it has yet to deliver the results it should. There is more to be done and that's why CMP, as a long-standing advocate of mediation and pioneer of workplace mediation, has taken a step back to see the bigger picture. Why is workplace conflict such a tough employment issue? Because managers haven't yet developed the skills they need to have difficult conversations; they still avoid managing poor performance, and find it hard to get their staff talking again when things go wrong. So we think Conflict Competence is the answer."

According to the OPP, the UK workforce keeps their emotions "bottled up", avoids conflict, and lets difficult situations get worse. In-order to buck this trend and make sure we can communicate with each other and our trading partners internationally, Britain is going to have to learn to relax that stiff upper lip!

White Paper: "Be a conflict-competent Employer and reduce the human, financial and reputational costs of escalated disputes"

(http://cmpresolutions.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/CMP_Whitepaper_-Be_a_Conflict_Compent_Employer.pdf)

Works Cited

CIPD. (2008). Leadership and the management of conflict at work. CIPD.

OPP. (2008). Fight, Flight or Face it? Celebrating the effective management of conflict at work. OPP.

WEE (2012) The Global Competitiveness 2012-13 by Klaus Schwab

Company information

CMP Resolutions is the leading provider of dispute resolution training and services to the UK's employers. Clients include the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Citi, British Airways, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

We believe everyone has the right to go to work without feeling fearful about a workplace conflict, and to work in an environment where people can raise difficult issues without this damaging their health or working relationships.

So we are in business to improve how organisations handle workplace disputes. We help employers create working climates where people have productive relationships, and we work with employers to maximise productivity and wellbeing by closing, managing and preventing negative conflict. CMP: we close, manage and prevent workplace conflict.

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